

**International Centre for Minority Studies  
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## **POVERTY AND ETHNICITY**

**Roma in Nadezhda and Nikola Kochev neighborhoods  
in the town of Sliven, and in the villages of Topolchane, Gorno  
Alexandrovo and Sotirya**

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# **POVERTY AND ETHNICITY**

## **Case study - Bulgaria**

### **Roma in Nadezhda and Nikola Kochev neighborhoods in the town of Sliven, and in the villages of Topolchane, Gorno Alexandrovo and Sotirya**

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#### **A. Statement of the Research Question.**

The central research question is: What are the conditions that create a tendency for poverty ethnicization? To what extent has an ethnically defined underclass been formed?

The bigger minority groups in Bulgaria - those of Bulgarian Turks, Bulgarian Muslims (Pomacks) and Roma - are affected by poverty to a greater extent compared to Christian Bulgarians. However, it is hardly possible to speak about underclass formation among the Bulgarian Turks and the Bulgarian Muslims (Pomacks). On the other hand, the changes in the socio-economic status of Roma in the last decade make it possible to study a formation of ethnically based underclass under almost laboratory conditions.

It has to be pointed out that the processes of underclass formation take place with a different speed and to a different degree among the various Roma sub-groups. The Roma "community" in Bulgaria is extremely heterogeneous. The various Roma sub-groups, which number goes beyond 60, differ in their way of life, language, religion, traditional crafts, customs, moral values, time of settlement, etc. It is rather a case of a social construct, in which Roma constitute a community only from the point of view of the rest of the population, while the social distances between the various Roma sub-groups are often bigger than those between them and the non-Roma. The attitude of the rest of the population is also different towards representatives of the various sub-groups. However, in the last few years, mainly due to the influence by the racist media, it has been growing more and more negative towards Roma a whole.

Already in XIX c. ethnographers and other social researchers revealed the strongly hostile attitude of Bulgarians and Turks especially towards the "naked" Gypsies. It significantly differed from the attitude towards other Roma sub-groups and was probably the basic reason for the constantly reproduced discriminatory behavior towards them. The present study focuses on the attitude of Bulgarians towards the different Roma sub-groups in the town of Sliven and in the villages of Sotirya, Topolchane and Gorno Alexandrovo from comparative perspective, and on the consequences of this attitude for the different Roma sub-groups, and especially for the "naked" Gypsies.

Special attention should be paid to the failure of all initiatives for integration and assimilation of the "naked" Gypsies during the communist period. The attempts for integration of this Roma sub-group

into the local economy, educational and health systems, as well as for changing their demographic behavior, proved unsuccessful during the years. In fact, neither the rural communities of the "naked" in Sotirya and Topolchane, nor the urban one from the "Nadezhda" district have ever been integrated into the local society. This is why their marginalisation should not be connected only with the period of transition to market economy, as some government officials often state. The "naked" Gypsies have been the poorest and the most neglected minority group in the region since XIX c. - a period for which there are relatively more data available, which gives reasons to speak about an underclass formation among this group before the communist period and the period of transition. At the same time it is necessary to study all the changes in the social status and in the living standard of this subgroup, which took place the last few years, as well as its "new" strategies to cope with the crisis.

Another important focus of the present study is the attitude of the civic society institutions and of the Roma NGOs in the last 10 years towards the "naked" Gypsies in the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane and in "Nadezhda" district in Sliven.

The researchers' interest is also oriented towards the impacts of segregation on the processes of impoverishment of the Roma population under conditions of heavy economic crisis. That is why the selection of the three villages and the two urban Roma communities, which differ significantly in terms of segregation/assimilation, offers a great opportunity to study this variable.

## **B. Selection of sites. Why are these Roma neighborhoods chosen?**

The Roma communities in the town of Sliven and in the surrounding villages are very interesting for research.

Roma have been living in Sliven and in the surrounding villages for centuries. There are representatives of the three main Roma sub-groups, as follows:

- **Bulgarian Roma** (Christian Roma) settled centuries ago. They are the best-accepted and integrated Roma sub-group in the town. They have been involved in the local textile industry since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century;
- **Turkish Roma** (Muslim Roma) of different sub-groups – **blacksmiths** and **tin workers, musicians, Yerlia** (long settled Roma who were engaged mainly in seasonal agricultural work) also settled in the town and in the surrounding villages for centuries. Local urban and rural population widely used their services both before the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman domination and after that;
- **Naked Roma** (labeled "*naked*" because of their extreme poverty) were not allowed to live in the town up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had nomadic way of life and earned their living mainly by making baskets and begging.

The researcher, who worked among the Roma communities in Sliven and the region, had the opportunity to learn a lot about the main Roma sub-groups in Bulgaria.

Sliven completely meets the requirement of the case study for monoindustrial town, which is being deindustrialized in the period of transition to market economy, after the loss of the enormous market of the former Soviet Union and the ex-members of CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic

Assistance). Roma, who were mainly involved in the local light industry, turn to be the worst affected by the process of deindustrialization. In the beginning of the 90's a big part of the unqualified and low-qualified workers were dismissed. They kept their positions only in the heaviest and dirtiest industries, as well as in the sphere of services, where nobody else wanted to work. In the last few years the industrial crisis in the town grew deeper which led to further cuts in the working staff, including a significant number of high-qualified Roma. Due to the fact they have never possessed their own land Roma do not have the chance to provide for their families by private farming, which is the basic survival strategy for Bulgarians.

The local Bulgarian population has a different attitude towards the various Roma sub-groups. This is the reason for their different level of integration (even assimilation) or, on the contrary, their marginalization. The various Roma sub-groups had a totally different way of life, social status and models of behavior. That is why in Sliven and in the surrounding villages we can study the influence of the majority attitude upon the level of integration of the different Roma sub-groups into the local society, as well as upon their social stratification and the formation of underclass in a historical perspective – in the pre-socialist period, in the period of socialism, in the years of deep economic crisis and transition into market economy.

The Roma neighborhoods in Sliven and in the villages of Sotirya, Topolchane, and Gorno Alexandrovo are typical for the Roma communities in Bulgaria. About 80% of the Roma in Bulgaria live in such isolated neighborhoods. The “model” of a typical urban Roma neighborhood can be defined through study of the sub-group divisions, the inner hierarchy and the area separation of the different Roma sub-groups in the Nadezhda ghetto and in the Nikola Kochev neighborhood. Roma neighborhoods in the villages of Topolchane, Sotirya and Gorno Alexandrovo present the typical rural model of life of different Roma sub-groups – long settled and semi-nomadic until recently.

There are enormous differences with respect to the attitude of Roma from different sub-groups and social strata towards the education of their children. These attitudes vary from the total exclusion of the idea for education from the system of values of the “*naked*” Roma to the strong desire, expressed by representatives of the Roma intelligencia from the Nikola Kochev neighborhood, that their children should go to university even at the cost of severe privation for the whole family. In turn, the education of children strongly affects the underclass formation.

### **C. Methodology**

The field research was carried out in the town of Sliven (in Nadezhda and Nikola Kochev neighborhoods), as well as in the Roma communities in the surrounding villages of Sotirya, Topolchane and Gorno Alexandrovo in the period of August, 2-28, 1999, February, 15<sup>th</sup> – March 4<sup>th</sup> 2000 and March 19-31, 2000.

The survey was conducted in typical Roma neighborhoods which give reasons to consider that the information gathered is typical for most of the Roma communities leaving in big town neighborhoods and in the surrounding villages in the country. The research group included neighborhoods in which Roma traditionally earn their living working in industrial enterprises; neighborhoods inhabited mostly by Naked Roma who led a semi-nomadic way of life until the mid-fifties, and whose characteristic features for centuries have been their poverty and marginalization; and typical mixed neighborhoods, products of the urbanization during the last 40-50 years. Roma in

the villages, included in the survey, also create an adequate picture of the rural Roma communities. There are long-settled Yerlia, who are traditionally involved in agricultural work. There are Naked Roma who have adapted to the rural way of life to such a little extent as to the urban way of life. There are villages- satellites of big towns and industrial complexes, in which Roma until recently were part of the hired labor force and who were left without livelihood after the industrial enterprises, in which they worked, were closed down.

The research group used different methods of study.

The main methodology used in the survey was key informant interviews with members of the community, community leaders, service providers, and NGO activists. In addition, open ended group interviews were conducted with members of the respondents' families and local municipal officials.

In the course of the survey representatives of 570 Roma households were interviewed in the summer of 1999, and information was gathered from more than one adult member in one-fifth of the households. A reliable and representative information about them and their families was gathered on the following topics:

- Family status, number of marriages, marital age;
- Respondents' own estimation of the age at which young people in their community marry;
- Number of their alive and dead children;
- Migration tendencies;
- Health status of the respondents and their families;
- Level of education and qualification of the respondents and their family members;
- Employment and unemployment;
- Access to services;
- Sources of income;
- Residential conditions and property;
- Interethnic relations and attitudes;
- Contacts with non-governmental organizations and with institutions providing different services and assistance;
- Contacts with educational and health institutions, labor offices and social assistance services, municipality and municipal councils, etc.

The interview included a large number of indicators about our respondents' spouses, children, parents and other members of the household. The semi-standardized interview, used in the study, provided information about approximately 3750 individuals.

During the case study we interviewed representatives of:

- 190 Roma families in Nadezhda ghetto (about 20% of the households in the community);
- 206 Roma families in Nikola Kochev neighborhood (over 30% of the households in the community);
- 65 Roma in the village of Sotirya (nearly half of the Roma households/;
- 69 Roma in the village of Topolchane /about 60-65% of the Roma households);
- 41 Roma in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo (about 80% of the Roma households).

In the winter of the year 2000 the researchers made 64 additional interviews with Roma. These interviews were focused mainly on family relations' issues and provided information about the respondents' interpretation of their present status and of their future perspectives.

43 interviews were carried out with state officials providing different services and assistance to the Roma: high officials from the local government (municipality and the municipal councils), village mayors, health workers, school head masters and teachers, employees in the local labor office and social assistance services.

Interviews were also held with five leaders of different Roma organizations in Sliven.

During the case study the members of the research group lived in Roma houses in the Nikola Kochev neighborhood and spent their spare time in the neighborhood, which provided opportunity for them to make observations on the way of life of the local community.

The researchers studied the life-stories of several families in Nikola Kochev and Nadezhda neighborhoods in Sliven.

The research also included a 'desk study' – study of the available demographic and statistical information and the documents from the labor office in Sliven.

The research group worked in the town archives, but unfortunately many of the documents, important for the study, had disappeared or had been destroyed.

The researchers studied the local village archives, containing data about birth and mortality rates, as well as about the marital status of the local population.

The research group did not finish the analysis. We have not systematized and analyzed all the information gathered yet. Additional work on the civil registers of the villages under study is forthcoming.

See **Appendix 1: Questionnaires used in the study.**

#### **D. What sociological and theoretical literature addresses your research question?**

In the Bulgarian sociological literature poverty and social structure variables, which determine it, have become a topical issue in the last ten years for various reasons. Indisputably, the most important reason is related to the sharp and deepening impoverishment of the Bulgarian population in the transition period as a result of the slow and often inadequate economic reforms in the country, as well as to the necessity of permanent monitoring and analysis of those processes in the search of a way to overcome the critical situation. However, the fact that for decades the poverty issues in Bulgaria have not been subject to analysis, what is more, they were a taboo for sociologists, does not mean that ten years ago there were no poor people in the country. The reasons were of an ideological character. The communist leaders could not allow such a research to be made because it would have been taken as criticism against its economic and social policy and against its claims of successful social management that under their government Bulgaria managed to build up a classless, just,

uniform and prosperous society. For that reason the very few studies of the socio-economic status of Roma never became known even to scholars. Any such studies were strictly confidential. Instead of a public discourse on the existing poverty issues, the communists brought forward the great achievements of the communist party in equalizing the living standards of all groups of the Bulgarian population as a result of the elimination of exploitation, full access to employment of all citizens of working age, free of charge education and health care. Currently Bulgarian sociologists seem to put a great emphasis on outlining poverty dimensions, as well as the subjective assessments of the socio-economic status, poverty among the low-paid employed individuals, and the lack of conditions for middle class formation. An ideological maxim has been established that “we all are poor” (the few “people of power” excluded) which often is interpreted as “we all are equally poor”. There is strong unwillingness to differentiate between various layers of poverty, apart from the case when it refers to poverty among disabled and pensioners, which is also related to political interests. The issue of ethnic dimensions of poverty is considered uncomfortable and undesirable both for the government and the general public, the latter being constantly manipulated by the racist, or in the better case, ethnocentric Bulgarian media. Even the scientific circles are strongly prejudiced against the significance of such studies.

At the same time, the mass and continuous isolation of Roma from the labor market, their segregation in extremely poor neighborhoods, and the dropping out of Roma children from school actually lead to underclass formation in the Bulgarian society. This term is not generally used in Bulgarian sociology, nor in the media, however, it is appropriate in the analysis of the processes we have been witnessing in the last few years.

It is hardly necessary to theorize the question of the content and definition of the term. The leading underclass researchers in the United States ((W. Wilson, T. Kahn, J. Gordon, L. Rainwater, Libermann, Glasgow, R. Aponte, M. Stewart, D. Massey, N. Denton, etc.) have been using this term since its introduction into the scientific field by Gunnar Myrdal in order to designate the lowest economic strata of the American society. Generally, it is used with reference to people who have fallen into the trap of continuous or everlasting unemployment, who are usually poorly educated or qualified, whose children inherit their parents’ poverty, as well as the great number of poor families of low-paid unqualified workers. Underclass is usually associated with the residents of big urban black ghettos in the former industrial centers. Therefore, apart from unemployment, poverty, poor education and inheritance by the next generations the other two structure variables identifying the term are race and residence in segregated poor neighborhoods. Race and segregation usually explain the social immobility and exclusion of those individuals and their poor chances to escape the trap of poverty.

In the course of our study we have found a great number of similarities between the problems of Roma in Bulgaria living in segregated neighborhoods and those of the Afro-Americans from the big urban ghettos, described by W. Wilson, as follows:

- Concentration of Roma in ghettos in the last ten years (In contrast with the American conditions, many Roma in Bulgaria who live in big isolated neighborhoods in the outskirts of villages and who do not possess agricultural land are rarely hired by their fellow-villagers even as seasonal workers and cannot find work in the industrial centers because of their low qualification. Those individuals are also part of the underclass formation.);

- Rapidly increasing and continuous unemployment which tends to become permanent. W. Wilson puts a special emphasis on problems related to the narrowing job opportunities in black ghettos and identifies unemployment as the most serious problem underclass members are faced with. A very important observation of W. Wilson which was also confirmed by our study is that the narrowed demand of low-qualified labor affects most severely those workers who have been marginalized, or least involved in economic life. Under the Bulgarian conditions worst affected by unemployment were those poor Roma groups who have alienated themselves from their traditional crafts and semi-nomadic way of life in the last century, who are very poorly educated and are practically illiterate, who have been made part of the economic life of the country in the 60s but did not manage to adapt to the employers' requirements of labor discipline and diligence, qualities to some extent forgotten by the rest of the Bulgarian citizens too under socialism;
- Sharp increase of poverty in those segregated districts, neighborhoods and ghettos and the accompanying low education of children, poor health status and destroyed family relations which contribute to its deepening and tendency towards its transfer to the next generations;
- Growing isolation of the residents of segregated neighborhoods;
- Increasing difference between the social status of the residents of segregated neighborhoods and the rest of the population;
- Deterioration of the social organization of the neighborhoods, namely of the degree to which the residents are in a position to control effectively the social behavior of community members, especially of adolescents and young people, and of the degree to which the neighborhood community is able to realize common goals.

The situation with the Bulgarian Roma, living in segregated neighborhoods and the Afro-Americans in the big ghettos differs mainly in terms of details. There are historical differences in the coexistence of Roma and ethnic Bulgarians on one hand, and black and white Americans, on the other hand. The different social conditions and duration of segregation, the social exclusion and unemployment among the two vulnerable groups is the reason why certain negative tendencies, typical for the black ghetto, have not yet taken place within Roma ghettos in Bulgaria, for example the drug problem and related crime, as well as the existing armed violence. The difference in the cultural traditions between Roma and Afro-Americans determines the difference in their family models. In the last ten years a growing number of young Roma do not register their marriage with the authorities, but in the same time, following the tradition of "common marriage", the community considers them married from the moment they start to have sexual relations. Although the processes of destabilization of poor Roma families are becoming more and more evident, they have not yet reached that level, which is observed in the black ghettos.

The analysis of socio-economic status of Roma and the problems of ethnicization of poverty to a certain extent go beyond the generally accepted tradition in the study of the Roma community in Europe. Usually, European experts on Roma issues focus their attention on the history of the Roma migrations, on their language and on the linguistic influences of the languages of the peoples they coexisted with upon Roma dialects. The experts are also interested in the Roma dramatic relation with the macro-society in the Middle Ages and nowadays, in their nomadic way of life, traditional



culture and family. The discrimination to which Roma groups in Europe have been systematically subjected to is usually discussed in general terms without paying particular attention on its socio-economic aspects and consequences. All this affects the processes of formation of Roma political elite in the Central and East European countries, which channels its efforts in two directions: attempts to become part of the government structures at different levels and search for financial opportunities to promote traditional Roma culture through various art festivals.

The assimilation pressure of the communist regimes in those countries directed against the preservation of Roma culture and traditions and the claims of those regimes that the mere fact of Roma being integrated into the working class will create conditions for fast deletion of all differences between them and the rest of the population have been accepted painfully by the Roma intellectuals. Nowadays any attempt to discuss social problems of Roma is met by suspicion on their part and leads to accusations that this is another way to neglect the importance of the cultural and ethnic identity of Roma, treating them only as a social group, which they consider an expression of cultural assimilation, open racism and ethnic discrimination. Very often Roma leaders reject the validity of the sociological data about the progressing impoverishment within the community, about its social exclusion and the formation of underclass among a growing number of its representatives. They do this as a protective measure against their association with the poorest community representatives. In the last few years Roma leaders have been trying to promote a new positive image of their community, accompanied with a definite denial of any negative implications about it. Therefore they often oppose to the classical studies of prominent West European authors in the field of Roma social issues.

## **2. Description of the communities**

### **Sliven region**

The region of Sliven is situated at the southern foot of the biggest mountain range on the Balkans - the Old Mountain (the Balkan), between the middle and the eastern division of the mountain, at the entrance of three mountain passes, which connect Southern and Northern Bulgaria. This location determined both the strategic role of the town and its dramatic fate. In many of military campaigns during the Ottoman rule Sliven was burned down and devastated and its population was forced to provide security for caravans crossing the mountain.

The Sliven plain has is temperate climate. Its winter is not very cold; however, snowstorms and blizzards often bury the roads under snow, root out trees and cause serious damages for the local population. The summer heat is more bearable due to the mountain influence, although the southern hot and dry wind in August and September often cause devastating drought, which makes it necessary to provide permanent irrigation of the crops. The average rainfall per year measured in the Sliven region is 550-600 mm. The soil is poor and eroded - talus brown forest soil and gray forest soil - which is good for the local sorts of vine and fruit. The abundance of pasture-ground provided good conditions for the development of sheep breeding in the region.

Sliven municipality includes the territory and the population of Sliven and 44 villages. According to the data from the Civil Registration Office in January 1999 the number of population in Sliven municipality was 152 062 individuals. Due to migration, the number of the permanent residents in the municipality is 145 206 individuals.

Up until recently Sliven was an industrial town with well-developed textile industry, heavy engineering, glass and food industry and electrical engineering. In the last few years the municipal economy was ruined. Due to the structural changes and the privatization of industrial enterprises the working staff has been sharply cut without any possibility for alternative employment.

Since the beginning of the 90s an increasing number of Roma have started to drop out from all social structures of the Bulgarian society. Due to their low education and level of qualification Roma have been badly affected by the first cuts in the working staff in 1990-1991. A large number of Roma women, working as cleaners in the sphere of community services and in the industrial factories, lost their jobs in the beginning of the 90s. The severe cuts in the mining and the processing industry, as well as in many outdated industrial enterprises, which widely used low qualified labor, additionally increased the number of unemployed mainly among the Roma community. Rural Roma were seriously affected by the close down of the former agricultural cooperatives of a socialist type, which provided jobs for nearly half of the Roma in the country. The fact that they never possessed their own land made it impossible for them to participate in the establishment of the new agricultural cooperatives and led to mass unemployment and marginalisation of the majority of Roma living in the villages.

There is a marked tendency among the Roma community towards increase in the level of unemployment and continuos dropping out of its members from the labor market. Due to the lack of current information at the labor offices about the unemployment on ethnic basis the researchers provide data from the 1992 census and two representative sociological surveys in support of this statement, as follows:

**Table 1****Structure of the Unemployment According to Ethnicity (%)**

<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Bulgarians</b>	<b>Bulgarian Turks</b>	<b>Roma</b>
Census 1992	14.4	25.2	39.1
Survey “Relations...” 1994	15.7	28.5	45.8
Survey “Relations...” 1997	12.3	29.3	49.7

The present study also showed that in the last few years there has been an increasing tendency towards migration of rural Roma, who have lost their basic means of living in the villages, into the bigger towns and other villages near towns or highways in their attempt to find an easier way to provide for their families. This migration is often accompanied by a sharp deterioration in the relations between Roma and their fellow-villagers, as well as with their search for anonymity and support among the numerous urban Roma population.

It turns out that a significant part of these newcomers do not find the expected solutions of their problems. In most of the cases they do not find permanent and very often even temporary jobs in the new settlement. Due to the fact that they are not permanent residents of the place the newcomers cannot register as unemployed and they are not allowed social assistance as such. Their living conditions are even worse than before. Their children drop out from school and they have a more difficult access to health services. There is no more social control on part of the larger family, of the small Roma community and of the bigger rural community.

The significant concentration of Roma migrants within limited areas presents another unfavorable factor for their adaptation into the new social environment. It leads to an increase in the competition at the narrow labor market for low qualified workers and the latter find it more and more difficult to ingrate into acceptable social structures. In the same time the above processes keep up the tendency towards hopelessness among Roma and increase their frustration and conviction that there is no chance for them survive within the racist and prejudices Bulgarian society, even if they follow the official norms. On the other hand their high concentration and large number create a feeling of powerfulness and anonymity. All this often leads to various forms of deviant behavior among the Roma community.

### **Social services**

The health services on the territory of the municipality are provided by the Regional Hospital, three polyclinics, one private pediatric clinic, and 11 medical centers in Nadezhda ghetto and in 10 villages, a House for Old People, Domestic Social Care, a House for Mentally Retarded People, a House for Blind People.

Around 30% of the doctors in Sliven municipality have a private practice. But nevertheless the health services deteriorated significantly. The main reason for this is that the municipal subsidies for

health services are absolutely insufficient. The money in the municipal budget is not enough even to provide for the staff's salaries. There are only 15 000 BGL (around 7 600 \$) in the municipal year budget for maintenance and repair works of all the hospitals, schools, kindergartens and social institutions on its territory. The hospital does not have the necessary medicines and consumables. Patients are treated for free in cases of emergency. However, after the third day of the treatment, or after the acute stage of the disease, they have to pay for the medicines. The treatment is free also in cases when the patient is a head of a very poor family. Situation is worse for those who have an average income, because they are obliged to pay for their treatment, which is simply impossible in many cases.

The problems related to personal health, the health of the family and the access to medical care are among the most serious ones for the Roma community. The health status of Roma sharply deteriorated due to the increasing poverty and the continual stress to which people in Bulgaria have been subjected in the fast few years. This is especially true for the Roma. The results of our interviews show that Roma have a low health status wherever, typical of poor people. 62% of the respondents declared that there were chronically sick members in their families - two members per family in half of the cases. One third of the chronically sick are children.

11% of our respondents declared that their children had not been vaccinated. The number of non-vaccinated children is the highest among the naked Roma in Nadezhda ghetto in Sliven and in the village of Sotirya – every fifth child in these neighborhoods is not vaccinated. This is the reason for some of the non-typical diseases on both sites. In 1992, 90 Roma children from Sotirya and Sliven caught poliomyelitis, while there were no cases of polio among Bulgarian children on both sites. When in 1993 diphtheria broke out, again in the same Roma neighborhoods, the doctors in many districts insisted that children allowances should only be paid upon presentation of valid immunization certificates for the children. This suggestion was rejected as discriminatory under the pressure of human rights activists and Roma leaders. The refusal to have the children vaccinated often raises problems between Roma and doctors. Many Roma are convinced that the vaccinations are harmful and believe that they have irreversible consequences – according to them they lead to sterilization.

The municipal budget provides for all the primary and elementary schools. The Ministry of Education finances the secondary and the high schools. In the last school year (1998 - 1999) there were 52 school institutions with 16 220 students on the territory of the municipality. These include 19 primary schools with 1290 pupils; 22 elementary schools with 6689 pupils; 6 secondary schools with 6504 students; 3 high schools with 1478 students; one sports school with 259 students and a Children's Arts Center. There are also 3 boarding houses at the schools, which provide shelter for 123 students, mainly Roma.

There are serious problems with the education of Roma children in the municipality. In the town of Sliven there is one segregated Roma school with pupils from the Nadezhda ghetto. Roma children from the Nikola Kochev district study at the mixed local school, where the majority of pupils - about 75% - are Roma. There are Roma pupils in the rest of the town schools too. In one of these schools Roma, who are less than 20% of the pupils, study in separate classes. In the rest of the schools there are ethnically mixed classes.

Most of the village schools are also basically “Roma”. This refers to the villages of Sotirya, Topolchane and Gorno Alexandrovo, included in the present study. Sotirya and Topolchane are

situated near Sliven and the Bulgarian families there prefer to send their children to the better town schools. There are almost no Bulgarians in Gorno Alexandrovo and due to the decreasing number of pupils in the school year of 2000-2001 the local school will be transformed into a primary one (up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade). Thus, in order to continue their education after primary grade, the bigger pupils will have to travel every day to the neighbor village. Considering the fact that the municipality does not cover pupils' travel expenses and that Roma parents usually do not let their girls travel alone, it is very likely that most of the local Roma children will drop out from school after 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Demographic characteristics**

The number of permanent residents in the municipal center Sliven is 100 141 individuals (according to the official statistics this number reaches 109 457 individuals). The number of children at the ages from 0 to 17 is 24 265 (22.2%). The number of individuals at working age (18-55 for women and 18-60 for men) is 67 269 or 61.4%, and this of individuals at pensionable age is 17 933 – 16.4% of the town population. The number of retired men is twice as small as this of retired women.

The demographic tendencies in Sliven municipality are similar to those in the country. The marriage rate is getting higher. 996 couples got married in 1986 (all of them in the town of Sliven). In 1998 this number went down to 608. There is a tendency towards increase in the age of marriage among Bulgarians, which is not observed among Roma. The cases of “traditional marriage” (without legal registration) are getting more and more popular among their community. According to state officials Roma women prefer the status of deserted mothers because it allows more social benefits. However, in most of the cases Roma women are not allowed such status, although they do not have officially registered marriage, which obliges us to look for yet another explanation.

In the last few years the birth rate in Sliven municipality is constantly decreasing. In 1989 the number of newly born babies in Sliven was 1 737, while in 1997 the same number hardly reached 1 089. The same tendency is observed when we compare the number of the cohorts of children at the ages of 0-6 and 7-14. The number of children under the age of 7 is 7 657, while those between 7 and 14 years are 11 332.

The death rate is constantly getting higher. In 1989 the number of people who died was 734, in 1997 this number grew to 1 137 and in 1998 it was 1 132. The natural population growth in 1989 was 1 003 individuals, while in 1997 it became negative –48. In 1998 there was an increase in the birth rate for the first time in the last few years – 1 208 newly born babies and a positive population growth of 76 individuals.

The National Institute of Statistics does not gather current data of the ethnic composition of the population between censuses. But in the last two years the Social Assistance Agency and the Labor Office in Sliven are trying to gather specific data about the largest Roma ghetto in the town – the Nadezhda neighborhood. According to data from the 1992 census the number of population in Sliven municipality was 144 060 individuals. 11 793 individuals or 8.2% of the population identified themselves as Roma, and 5 942 or 4.1% - as Turks. According to expert evaluations (on the grounds of our interviews with social and health workers) the number of Roma living in the Nadezhda ghetto reaches 12 000 individuals. Roma leaders declare that more than 40% of the municipality population is Roma, although many Roma prefer to identify themselves as Bulgarians or Turks.

According to data from the present study 71% of the interviewed identified themselves as Roma, although all of our respondents are considered Roma by the rest of the population. 7% of the interviewed identified themselves as Bulgarians and 5% - as Turks. Another 17% refused to identify themselves on ethnic basis. It is important to point out that only 6 years ago during the survey *Roma in the Transition Period* almost half of the residents of Nikola Kochev district identified themselves as Bulgarians. Along with the increasing unemployment and the growing isolation of Roma from the social, political and cultural life in the town, as well as with the increasing negative stereotypes and the open hostility against them on part of Bulgarians, Roma have changed their way of self-identification.

The ethnic self-identification of our respondents is based on gender, age and place of residence. Men more often identify themselves as non-Roma - 35% against 26% for the women (Krammer's coefficient  $K=0.168$ ). The same refers to our oldest respondents - 37% of them declared that they were not Roma. The majority of those, who identified themselves as Bulgarians, live in the part of Nikola Kochev district provided with better public services and closer to the neighboring Bulgarian suburb. Part of the most well-to-do residents of Nadezhda district identified themselves as Turks. Many of the residents of Nadezhda district, who traditionally identified themselves as Turks in the official censuses and during my 1994 survey, now refused to declare their ethnic identity as a result of the fact that in the last few years they became Protestants. Such refusals for ethnic self-identification were more frequent among our respondents from the Nikola Kochev district.

Hardly 57% of the total number of 570 interviewed in the summer of 1999 declared that their mother tongue was Romany. Bulgarian is the mother tongue of 36% of our respondents - mainly from the Nikola Kochev district, more rarely in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo and among the few interviewed Bulgarian Gypsies in Topolchane, living outside the Roma neighborhood 7% of our respondents speak Turkish language at home. The latter are mostly from the Nadezhda district.

Table 2 presents data about the number, the way of settling and the sub-group division of the interviewed Roma from Sliven and the three villages included in the study.

**Table 2**

**Characteristics of the Roma neighborhoods included in the study**

Characteristics	Sliven - Nadezhda	Sliven - Nikola Kochev	Sotirya	Topolchane	Gorno Alexandrovo
Type of settlement	Urban Ghetto	Urban neighborhood	Village Ghetto	Village Ghetto	Village (dispersed)
Population of the site	Sliven 106212	Sliven 106212	1150	2639	691
Number of Roma	8000 - 12000	4000-6000	850	800-900	180-300

Roma sub- groups	Turkish Musicians Naked Gradeshki Bebrovski	Bulgarian Naked	Naked	Turkish Bulgarian Naked	Turkish Bulgarian (Yerlia)
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*Note: The data about the number of population are from the results of the 1992 census. There are some changes in these data cited in the report, based on mayors' evaluations. The data about the number of Roma in the neighborhoods, included in the study, are based on expert evaluation. The National Institute of Statistics does not publish or announce data about the ethnic composition of the population in the particular settlements.*

## Nadezhda Ghetto

Nadezhda neighborhood (former name 'Dame Gruev') was established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the majority of the Turkish Roma moved from Komluka neighborhood in Sliven to the outskirts of the town. Later they were followed by the "naked" Roma, who did not have permanent dwellings in Sliven up until then. Now this is one of the poorest urban ghettos in Bulgaria. A 3 m high concrete wall surrounds the ghetto. It is extremely overpopulated and offers very poor living conditions.

At present the population of the neighborhood consists of Roma from various groups. Turkish Roma are additionally divided into two big sub-groups. The representatives of the first one have preserved their Turkish mother tongue and up until the mid 70's their children studied at the 'Turkish school' in Sliven. Nowadays these are the wealthiest Roma in the ghetto. They often identify themselves as Turks.

The representatives of the other Turkish sub-group identify themselves as Roma and are called 'musicians' after their traditional craft. The majority of them speak Romany mixed with many Turkish words.

Before 1990 most of the Turkish Roma and the musicians worked in the public cleaning services, in the water supply and sewerage and rarely in the textile industry as low-qualified labor. Part of the Turkish Roma, blacksmiths by tradition were involved in their own crafts' cooperative, which was very popular for the good quality of its services.

The Roma, called "naked" because of their traditional poverty, had the lowest qualification and were involved in organized labor mainly in the public services and as unqualified workers – as late as in the end of sixties. The majority of them used to be beggars, thieves and fortune-tellers in the past. The majority of "naked" Roma women have never worked. As mothers of many children they have been granted income, length of service and social assistance. Presently the "naked" Roma are the largest Roma group in the ghetto.

Here it is necessary to make some points referring to the group of the "naked" Roma in Sliven, as well as to the Roma in Sotirya and Topolchane. In the Bulgarian ethnographic and sociological literature is definitely identified as "Wallachian". As early as in the end of the XIX c. in part I of his study *The Principality of Bulgaria from Historical, Geographic and Ethnographic Perspective* the prominent Bulgarian expert in demography G. Dimitrov wrote about the Wallachian Gypsies living in Sliven, with a special emphasis on the description of their women's beauty (Dimitrov, G., 1894, p. 81). Later, in 1911 in his book *An Attempt for Study of the Town of Sliven* Dr. Simeon Tabakov described the various Gypsy groups in the town, pointing out that "*the worst of the Sliven Gypsies are the so called Wallachian Gypsies, who live in shacks, totally separated from the town to the south of the Turkish suburb ... They are new...*" (in the sense of new-comers, considering the fact that according to Dr. Tabakov Bulgarian Gypsies had settled in Sliven by XV c. - I. T.). He also refers to Wallachian Gypsies as to beggars and fortune-tellers "strongly despised by the Bulgarian Gypsies" (Tabakov, S., 1911, p. 391-396). Prof. V. Marinov in his article *Observations of the Way of Living of Gypsies in Bulgaria* identified Gypsies from the village of Gradetz (part of who moved to the Nadezhda district in Sliven) and those from Sotirya as Wallachian. According to him rural Wallachian Gypsies made their living basically by wood processing, basket-making and production



of spoons, spindles and other household goods (Marinov, V., 1962). Those were the traditional crafts of some of the “naked” Roma families in the Nadezhda district and in the villages of Topolchane and Sotirya. However, the researchers have met whittlers and basket-makers from the group of the Turkish Roma in various parts of Bulgaria, who definitely rejected any connection between them and the Wallachian Gypsies. There are such types of Roma in the other Balkan countries too; who do not identify themselves as Wallachians and are not considered such by the rest of the population either.

Prof. Ivanichka Georgieva is strongly influenced by the above quoted Bulgarian authors. In two of her books (*Studies on the Way of Living and the Culture of the Bulgarian Gypsies in Sliven, BAS, IEIM, 1966* and *Characteristics of the Way of Living and the Culture of the Bulgarian Citizens of Gypsy Origin* - part of the study *Establishment of a Socialist Way of Life among the Bulgarian Citizens of Gypsy Origin*, ordered by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1980) she identified “naked” Gypsies as Wallachian.

This definition is to a great extent adopted by the population in Sliven and in the surrounding villages with representatives of the “naked” Roma. Turkish and Bulgarian Roma in Sliven refer to the “naked” with an open contempt and when asked about a more particular description of this group they usually identify it as Wallachian too.

It will be interesting to mention that in the old civic registers (from 1886 to 1960) the “naked” Gypsies from the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane have never been identified as Wallachian. There they are referred to as “Muslim Gypsies”, “Turkish Gypsies” and their crafts are rarely mentioned - basket-makers, whittlers, agricultural workers. “Naked” Roma also never identify themselves as “Wallachian”. They very often assert that their group has no name or use the generally spread one - “naked”. Roma from Sotirya and Topolchane insist they belong “to the same group as those from Nadezhda district” and often marry “naked” Roma from the urban ghetto.

A team of doctors in genetics, who studied the progressive muscular dystrophy among Roma in Bulgaria in 1997-1999 and who conducted a research especially in the Nadezhda district and in the village of Topolchane, definitely deny the possibility to consider “naked” Roma as a part of the Wallachian group. Dr. Turnev and his colleagues tested the blood of 305 Roma in the Nadezhda district from the groups “Turks”, “musicians” and “naked” and the results of their tests showed an absolute gene identity between the representatives of the above three groups. 8% of the tested mature individuals from the three groups in the Sliven ghetto and nearly the same percentage of those in the village of Topolchane were carriers of the mutated gene, causing the disease of gamma sarcoglycanopathy. On the other hand there is no representative of the sub-groups of Wallachian Roma in Bulgaria, who carries the above mentioned mutated gene.

It is possible that this “gene identity” is due to an exchange of sexual partners between the representatives of the above three groups, who have lived together isolated in the ghetto for 100 years now. Our respondents from the three groups very emotionally denied such a hypothesis. “Turks” and “musicians” asserted that they had never married girls from the group of the “naked” and that they had never allowed their girls to get married with boys from this neglected group. However, this does not exclude the possibility for sexual contacts and a hereditary infection of children with the mutated gene, although the researchers could not get unambiguous information in support of such a hypothesis.

According to Dr. Turnev and his colleagues the mutated gene, isolated among Roma in the Nadezhda district, has been also found among Roma in other countries, where the Wallachian group has not been identified, as well as among Sinty groups, which deny their relationship with Roma. The above doctors are convinced of the common origin of all groups, among which there are carriers of the mutated gene. According to them these groups have dispersed throughout the whole Europe for many centuries and they have long ago lost the knowledge about their common origin.

It is possible that Dr. Turnev is right. For example, it is a fact that “naked” Roma in the sites of our study used to be Muslims, and this religion is very rare among Wallachian Roma. There are certain exceptions in some groups of “lahovi”. It could be that Roma from the other two more respected and prestigious groups of the Muslim Gypsies in Sliven named “naked” Roma Wallachian in order to avoid the possibility that they themselves be identified as “naked” by the state authorities and by the rest of the local population.

Whatever the reason might be, the case with the “naked” Roma shows how difficult it is to identify ethnicity only on the grounds of “objective criteria” such as “common origin”, “common religion”, and “common language”.

In addition I have to admit that after my work with the civic registers in the archives and after reading the publications of the above doctors’ team, I find it very hard to neglect the fact that “naked” Roma do not identify themselves as Wallachian and that for them it is just another exonym, a name they are given by the “others”. That is why, in spite of the whole scientific tradition of identifying “naked” Roma as Wallachian, our research team preferred to use the name with which the group identifies itself - “naked Gypsies”.

Apart from these largest and oldest groups, there is also a significant number of bebrovski (from the village of Bebrovo) and gradeshki (from the village of Gradetz) Roma in the ghetto. The gradeshki Roma have always had the worst reputation. They are known for being the thieves and the bandits of the neighborhood. Due to this they often identify themselves as “naked” Roma.

Marriage rate is extremely high among all of the three main groups. Almost 90% of the interviewed are married, although part of this ties are “out of wedlock”. It is true that the number of “traditional marriages” is almost equal to the number of civic marriages - respectively 40.5% and 56.2%. The share of divorces is higher than the average for the country - 3.2%. 6.5% of the interviewed have more than one marriage. Most of them have a second, rarely a third marriage.

The average marital age for men in this neighborhood is 15.9 years. For women it is fallen to 14.2 years.

There is no data for strongly expressed desire for migration in the ghetto. Only 9% of the Roma dream to leave the country. More than 46% have not even thought about such a possibility. Every tenth of the respondents declared that he/she would not leave the country even if they had the chance. At the same time, 1/9 of the interviewed Roma has already been abroad (on an excursion, on a business trip or to do trade). However, 28.2% would like to move to another neighborhood or town/village if they have a possibility. 1/12 of the interviewed has traveled to other villages in Bulgaria. The rest have not left their town more than a year (there are even cases of Roma that have never left the neighborhood in their whole life).

### **Nikola Kochev district in Sliven**

The number of Roma from the group of the “Bulgarian” Roma who live in Nikola Kochev neighborhood (formerly known as the 'Roma neighborhood', or Komluka) is about 5 000 – 6 000 individuals. They are Christians, who settled a long time ago. The processes of assimilation among them were quite visible. Most of them speak only Bulgarian. There are frequent case of mixed marriages between them and Bulgarians.

Most of the people living in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are traditional textile workers. Their ancestors were the first workers in the textile industry in the town in the middle of the XIX century. People there are proud with their family history going back to the labor unions and communist struggles in the beginning of the century, as well as with their high level of education and active participation in local civic, political and cultural initiatives. Nowadays all members of the 26 Roma NGOs in Sliven are present or former inhabitants of Nikola Kochev neighborhood. The newly established political party Free Bulgaria of Roussi Golemanov, a lawyer and a Roma leader, recently opened its pre-election campaign. The party expected to win third place at the local government elections in the autumn. It is the fourth political party, presented in the new local council and has two members of the Municipal Council; one of them is the party leader Roussi Golemanov. The mayor of Topolchane is also a member of Free Bulgaria.

There is a spatial differentiation between the different social strata within the group in Nikola Kochev neighborhood “The most respectable” representatives of the community live in direct contact with the Bulgarians - just at the opposite side of the street. They do not speak Romany. Their children attend school regularly and graduate from high school on a mass scale. A relatively big part of them continue their education in different higher schools. Usually the adults are high qualified. A big part of them are still employed. There are many old people in this part of the neighborhood. Their children have bought apartments in other neighborhoods and in most of the cases are completely assimilated.

The houses of the poorer Roma are situated in the outskirts of the neighborhood, high on the top of the hill. This part of the neighborhood is called “the Jungle”. Its inhabitants have traditionally lower educational level and qualification, lower social status, and are less inclined to assimilation. Most of the Roma families here speak both Romany and Bulgarian.

In the last ten years many poor families from Nadezhda ghetto moved into the periphery of the ‘Jungle’. They have very bad living conditions, in huts made of materials at hand, often without water supply and electricity. The rest of the neighborhood inhabitants treat the newcomers with a deep contempt and try to avoid any contacts with them.

Up until recently the neighborhood had the typical outlook of an old urban working-class suburb with its numerous one or two-storey houses with small pretty yards and outside toilets and the narrow sidewalks with lots of parked cars. Presently the number of the cars grew apparently smaller (or may be they are parked in garages); the houses became more crowded, because young families cannot afford an apartment of their own. Streets are crumbling, water from the blocked sewerage runs on them. All day long unemployed guys stroll around sharing their problems with the others.

All of them know each other. The fear of intrigues and spreading rumors, of destroying one's image and rejection by the community are still very powerful social regulators preventing youngsters and more desperate adults from deviant behavior. This type of social control excludes, however, the "new-comers" from Nadezhda ghetto.

### **Demographic characteristics of the Nikola Kochev district**

The Roma in Nikola Kochev neighborhood usually get married at around their late teens, but this is not true about the young people from "the Jungle", who often marry between the ages of 14-16 years. A strong tendency towards earlier marriages is observed in the last few years.

Even in this poorest part of the neighborhood the number of old people is considerably high compared to Nadezhda neighborhood, where they are almost missing (people at the age of 40 years there look like 70 years old and they rarely live up to 55-60 years). 16% of our respondents are widows, 70% are married and another 9% - divorced. 75% of the interviewed have an officially registered marriage (compared to 56% in Nadezhda). 13,5% are married for a second or – rarely – a third time. The average marital age in the neighborhood is 18.4 years. But in the Jungle our respondents follow the tendency of early marriages, typical for the poor Roma; half of them got married before they became 16 years old.

The average number of the children per family in the whole Nikola Kochev neighborhood is 2.6. There is a bigger number of children in the 'Jungle' - 3.7 children per family on the average. For several decades now Roma from the more well-to-do and better-educated families in the other part of the neighborhood have rarely had more than 2 children. According to 2/3 of our respondents the ideal family should have no more than 2 children. But in the Jungle the ideal family has 3 and even 4 children. Newcomers from Nadezhda usually declare that they prefer to have 4 and more children.

The infant mortality in Nikola Kochev neighborhood is twice as lower as in Nadezhda ghetto. But there were more cases of children deaths in the last few years. 14% of the families have lost one or more children, in most of the cases – in the first year of their life. The average number of dead children per family is 1.3.

There is a considerably strong tendency towards migration; much stronger compared to the Nadezhda neighborhood 48% of our respondents expressed their willingness to leave the town, which no longer offers jobs. Every sixth of them claimed that she/he had already chosen another town to move. 39% dream to leave the country for a while or forever. The same share claimed that they have already been abroad. Every third of our respondents went on trips abroad 'in the good old times'. 11% of the interviewed have traveled to neighboring countries on private business. This type of mobility was not typical for the Roma in Nadezhda ghetto and in the neighboring villages. Only 1 to 3% of the rural Roma and 8% of the inhabitants of Nadezhda have ever been abroad.

## **Roma in the village of Topolchane**

The village of Topolchane is located at around 8-10 km from the town of Sliven. Its Turkish name is Kavaklii. It was renamed to “Topolchane” in 1934. Both names have the same meaning: “kavak” and “topola” mean “poplar”. In the XVIII century there was an enormous centuries-old forest on this area.

The village had a mixed population, including Bulgarians, Turks and Roma. According to data from the Office of Statistics in Sliven, the population of Topolchane in January 1999 was 2656 individuals. There is no current information for the ethnic composition of the population collected between the censuses, but according to the expert evaluations, the Roma in Topolchane are around 800-1100 individuals. According to the 1992 census many of them declared Bulgarian ethnic identity. During our fieldwork they presented themselves either as “Bulgarian Roma”, as “Naked Roma”, or as “Turkish Roma”. According to data from the village archives in 1960 their Turkish names were changed into Bulgarian and fathers had to submit requests for changing the names of all family members. After 1990 most of the Roma in the village joined the local Protestant church. At present there are three family churches with Roma pastors in the neighborhood. It is probably because they changed their religion that now most of the Roma identify themselves as “Bulgarian Roma”. However, Bulgarians still call them “naked” and the fact that they often marry girls from Nadezhda neighborhood gives reasons to suggest that they belong to one and a same sub-group, who accepted the Islam during the Ottoman rule.

There are only a few families of real Bulgarian Roma in the neighborhood. They live among the Bulgarians and are very well integrated into the village community. They have comparatively high education and do not differ from Bulgarians as regards to living conditions and way of life. One of the representatives of this group is a painter. Another one is a chairman of the Roma cooperative *Romiko* and a former activist of the Joint Roma Union.

After the restitution of land Bulgarians received their parents’ ex-property and now they are able to produce the necessary food products for their own consumption and even for the market. Roma had no land in the past and received nothing. According to our respondents about 5% of the village population is “rich” - this refers to several Bulgarian families who possess more than 100 decares of arable land, which they cultivate with their own farming machinery. 20% of the local population is described as “average”. The latter possess between 20 and 50 decares of arable land. Most of the villagers have from 2-3 to 10-15 decares of land. Divided into smaller plots this land became more difficult for cultivation and parts of it are already wasted.

Bulgarian Roma were also affected by the unemployment, but they have bigger houses with larger yards, where they can grow fruit and vegetables. However, most of the Roma in Topolchane live in the “Gypsy neighborhood”. Formerly every family there possessed yards of half a decare. In the process of rapid enlargement of families these yards have been used for building new houses for the young families, so, in practice, now there is no more space left for growing vegetables.

According to the former mayor and the chairman of the agricultural cooperative in 1978 all Roma families in the village received 1 decare of arable land each. Some of them sold their new property to Bulgarians and the rest simply did care of it. In the 90’s local Roma families were offered plots in the municipal vineyards, which they could cultivate and cover part of their needs after selling the

produces grapes. However, this approach also proved to be unsuccessful. Roma either gave up their plots to Bulgarians for small amounts of money, or simply did not cultivate them.

### **Demographic characteristics**

The case study in the village of Topolchane included 62 Roma households consisting of 507 members - the average of 8.2 individuals per household. All of the respondents at the age of 18 years and more were married, 6% of them were widows, another 7% - divorced and deserted mothers. 35% have not registered their marriage. One in every 6 has a second marriage. The total number of children in the interviewed households was 267, or 4.3 children per household on the average – as much as in Nadezhda ghetto in Sliven, a little bit less than in the village of Sotirya. According to half of the respondents the ideal family should not have more than 2 children, however, for one half of them it was a family with 4 and more children.

In the last 10 years the demographic behavior of Roma in Topolchane differed significantly from the typical one for the whole country, as well as from the typical tendencies for Roma in Bulgaria.

In the communist period Roma used free medical services accessible for all Bulgarian citizens and followed the regular requirements for vaccination of children. Mothers gave birth in hospitals under medical care. Illegal abortions were reduced to the minimum. As a result there was a sharp decrease in infant and mother mortality. However slow, the decrease in mortality rates reduced the birth rate among the Roma. Under the pressure of administrative punishments and control as well as in connection with introduction of obligatory secondary education, a tendency of increasing the marital age appeared within Roma community.

The above described tendencies were typical for the “old” settled Bulgarian Roma population in Topolchane. In the 70’s in this group gradually adopted the family model of three and even to two children per family. The birth rate among the “Turkish Roma” is still high, although there is a comparative decrease in the number of children per family in their sub-group. Most of the Roma children from the village have completed their elementary education (till 8 grade). It was possible to obtain secondary education in Sliven, as the municipality paid all expenses for transportation and a significant part of the teaching materials. Just a few of the young Roma took this opportunity. Roma considered elementary education high enough for them. Roma girls stopped school even before 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They could easily find a job in the local cooperative with primary education (4<sup>th</sup> grade). Young men started to marry after they had completed their army service, i.e. after the age of 19 years.

Since the 70s and the 80s local Roma started to build two- and three-storey houses. Most of them used the benefits from the social program for birth encouragement. According to this program, young families had the right to receive an interest-free state loan for building or buying a house in the first two years of their marriage, if their marriage was legally registered. If they had 2 children within a period of 3 years, 50% of the loan was canceled (i.e. it was not paid off). If they managed to give birth to 3 children, 80% of the loan was canceled. Thus Roma who settled in Topolchane received the loan, built big houses and gave birth to at least 3 children. About 50-60 two-storey houses were built only in the “Roma neighborhood” in the village.

In period of transition to market economy the possibility to receive marriage loans was canceled. An enormous part of the Roma remained unemployed. Due to the big share of unemployed poor Roma in Sliven 13% of the municipal budget is spent for social assistance, but it is absolutely not enough to cover all people in need. The municipality and the Regional Office for Social Assistance decided not to allow monthly social aid to rural families, in which both parents are unemployed. Only single mothers and handicapped people have the right to monthly social aid. Families with both parents unemployed can rely on the seasonal aid for heating during the 4 winter months, as well as on maternity benefits (if the mother has worked for at least 7 days during her pregnancy) and on the children allowances that are extremely low.

The changes in the social policy immediately affected the reproductive behavior of Roma. They started to marry at an earlier age, to avoid civic marriages (in order to receive help as single mothers) and to give birth to more children (which provides at least some income).

The marital age of the young Roma sharply decreased - to 14 years for the girls, and to 15.1 years for the boys. Poverty, early marriages, and early frequent births are the reason why a significant part of the babies are prematurely born, which increased infant mortality.

The “newcomers” from Sliven and the “mixed families” of Roma from Topolchane and Nadezhda neighborhood never overcame their traditional family model of early marriages and large number of children in the family. If there was a difference in the reproductive behavior of the two Roma sub-groups, at the present this difference has been almost completely lost.

According to data from the Regional Office of Statistics about the birth rate in Topolchane in January 1999 the number of children at the ages between 0 and 6 years was 365; there were 317 children at the ages between 7 to 14 years and 128 at the ages between 15-17 years. In the first half of the 80's the average number of newly born babies per year in Topolchane was 42.7. At the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's this number was 39.6 and in the last 7 years it became 52.1. The predominant part of children born in the village are Roma. In 1997 all the 72 newly born babies in the village were Roma. In 1998 only 4 of the 68 newly born babies were Bulgarian and in 1999 this number reached 5 or 6 of the 70 newly born babies. There is small number of young Bulgarians in the village. Bulgarian families in Topolchane usually have one child and in the last few years there was a sharp decrease in the birth rate among their community. The increasing number of newly born babies in the village is completely due to the higher birth rate among Roma, which is both an indicator and a reason for their impoverishment.

There is almost no tendency towards migration among Roma in Topolchane. Only 6% of the respondents expressed willingness to live in town or in another village in the country, and 6% - to go to another country. For the majority of these people migration is only a dream. They consider the lack of money a basic obstacle for its fulfillment. None of the respondents had traveled to the neighboring countries on private business. Only one person had worked in the former Soviet Union.

### **Roma in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo**

The village of Gorno Alexandrovo (formerly named Burgudzhii) is about 30 km far from Sliven. The legend tells that the village was named after Roma craftsmen living in the village - *burgudzhii*, who produced iron tools for wood processing.

In January 1999 the population of the village was 705 individuals. According to expert evaluations more than 200 of them are Roma. They are descendants of old settled Roma, named Yerlia, who earned their living by agricultural work and by various cheap services which they provided to the local population. None of the interviewed gave us another name of the group.

After the restitution of agricultural land to its former owners the situation has changed. The Roma have never owned land. That is why they could not become members of the new agricultural cooperatives. They could only be hired as agricultural workers. Due to the poor management of the cooperative in the last years Roma workers received their salary in agricultural products in stead of cash. Most of them still work in the newly established cooperative or as seasonal workers in neighboring villages. They grow vegetables and breed domestic animals in their yards for family use.

### **Demographic characteristics**

The average Roma household in Gorno Alexandrovo consists of 5-6 members. These are half of the households included in the present study. Only one of our respondents lives in a household with 14 members. There is no household with two or three members. There is a clear tendency towards large families, which was also observed in Nadezhda ghetto and in the village of Sotirya, where the old parents live together with the family of one of their sons. The nuclear family model is considered unpractical from a financial perspective.

90% of the respondents live with their wives/husbands. 27% of the respondents live with their married children. That is why the share of individuals who live with their grandchildren is also high - almost every forth. 37% of the respondents live together with their parents. There are 6 individuals per family on the average.

It is traditionally accepted in the village that women do the housework. Almost 100% of the interviewed stated that the woman in their family did only housework. None of the respondents mentioned cases when men did any kind of housework in the family. However, the research team witnessed a case when a man was preparing winter supplies together with the rest of the family, and another case of men who were doing some small repair work in the house. But even those people asserted that housework is "*women's business*" and that they are only responsible to provide for the their families.



Marital age of the Roma in the village is considerably higher than in the rest of sites included in the study. The average marital age is 17.6 years for the men and 15.2 years for the women.

88% of our respondents are married. Every twentieth person is divorced, and only one man is a widower. Civic marriages here are most popular than anywhere else - 73% of the couples had legally registered marriage. Only 25% of the interviewed have a traditional marriage. 7% are married for a second time. None of the respondents has been married for a third time.

74% of the respondents stated that according to them the ideal family model that of one or two children per family. There were single cases when the desired number of children reached 4 or 5.

In the 70's and the 80's Roma in the village adopted the model of 2 and 3 children per family. In the first half of 90's the birth rate in the local Roma community sharply decreased, compared to the previous 5 years. In the second half of the 90's, however, Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo followed the tendency towards increase in the birth rate, already observes in the rest of sites, although this process here is much slower. There is only one family with 12 children. The eldest child is 21 years old, the youngest is at the age of 1 year. 37% of the interviewed have between 1 and 2 children. Another 24% have 3 children. 21% have 4 children. The average number of children per Roma family in Gorno Alexandrovo is 3.6.

The table below presents the above data about the birth rates in the village.

**Table 3**

**Birth structure in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo in the last two decades**

Years	Number of newly born babies
1980-1984	42
1985-1989	53
1990-1994	25
1995-1999	41

According to data from the village mayor in the last 10-12 years all the newly born babies in Gorno Alexandrovo were Roma. In the last 20 years there have been 6-7 Bulgarian babies in the village.

This is one of the villages with a comparatively smaller number of children per family than this in the rest of sites included in the study. The average number of children per family was lower - 2.7-only in Nikola Kochev neighborhood in Sliven.

### **Roma in the village of Sotirya**

The village of Sotirya is located at around 5 km from Sliven. Its population is about 1653 people: 850 Roma, and 803 Bulgarians.

According to the most serious researcher of Sliven and the region of Sliven from the beginning of the century, Dr. Simeon Tabakov, the village of Sotirya has already been founded during the time of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (VII – X c.) as a monastery settlement. In medieval times up until the

Ottoman conquest Roma often used to settle in monastery areas, where they made their living by various services they offered to the local people. Most of the Roma were blacksmiths or general laborers. On the grounds of insufficiently clear data Dr. Tabakov suggests that Roma have settled on the monastery lands of Sotirya already since XII c. According to most of the Bulgarian historians, the first unambiguous data about Roma presence on the monastery lands there date from XIV c. The same also refers to the other Roma settlements in our country.

Initially, the village was named Spasovo. Sotirya is the Greek translation of the name Spas (Savior). The village was named after the most famous monastery on this area dedicated to the Bulgarian St. Petka.

There are remains of ancient fortresses and roads on the area of this old historical village. Parts of an old cobblestone road are preserved on the road from Sliven to Kotel, above the village of Sotirya. There is a legend that such stone pavement was leading from Sotirya to Veliko Tarnovo (the capital city of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom - XIII-XIV c.) and Bulgarian kings have annually come to present gifts to the monastery in Sotirya. This monastery was devastated by the Turks together with the monasteries around the town of Sliven (Tabakov, p. 446.).

In XVIII c. and at the beginning of XIX c. Sliven and the nearby villages were subjected to permanent attacks of Turks, Kurdzhalii, Janissaries and Daalii. The village was burnt several times. In order to protect themselves from the constant incursions of gangs of robbers, the citizens of Sliven built a strong city wall. At the end of XVIII c. a significant part of the population of Sotirya moved to Sliven, where they founded a new neighborhood - "Novo Selo". Presently this urban quarter is inhabited by both Bulgarians and Roma families, well integrated into the local community, and often - assimilated. There is no data that they are also descendants of Roma immigrants from Sotirya. Most of them are "Bulgarian Roma", descendants of old families who have worked in the town textile factories since the middle of XIX c.

Roma in the village of Sotirya belong to the sub-group of Naked Roma. Up until 1965 they had Arabic names and professed the Islam. According to the data of the Bulgarian ethnographer Dimitar Marinov in XIX c. they made their living mainly by basket-making, begging and fortune-telling. Local Roma were not engaged in agricultural work and up until the middle of the XX c. they practically led a semi-nomadic way of life. The attempts of the communists to make at least a part of them good agricultural workers by engaging them in the local cooperative farm were never fully successful, although more than half of the Roma used to work in the communist cooperatives from the beginning of the 60s up until their closure down in 1991-1992. Agricultural work was not among Roma traditional crafts and they have never become used to it.

Roma traditionally make their living by basket-making and beggary. They used to gather and sell clay and medicinal herbs. Now the gathering of medicinal herbs and scrap materials together with stealing and begging are the main sources of income for more than half of the Roma families in the village.

In the 60's and 70's most of the Roma men started to work in different factories in Sliven as general laborers. At the end of 80's nearly half of the men from the community worked in Sliven.

Women almost did not work. They gave birth to a lot of children and used the right for early retirement as mothers of many children and the maternity benefits - sums almost equal to the average salary.

In the 60's the Municipal Council in Sliven passes a resolution for internment of Roma families with criminal activities from the town to the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane as well as to other villages in the region. These forced migrations continued up to the end of 80's. The local Bulgarian population accepted new immigrants with suspicion and hostility. The Roma neighborhood on the hill at the southern end of the village was striking with its poverty and disrepair even in the communist period. At present local Roma are totally marginalized.

The village of Sotirya is the poorest of all sites included in the study. Due to its closeness to the town most of the village lands were nationalized in the beginning of the 50's and sold as villa plots to people from Sliven. Their ex-proprietors would expect to be given back at least part of their former property or to receive some compensations for it.

The wealthiest people in the village – all of them – ethnic Bulgarians, possess small plots of land – 15-20 decares – and keep domestic animals – some 14 to 15 cows, or 20 goats, or some 30 sheep. Most of the local Bulgarian families keep one cow or a sheep, a pig and some fowl. Only a few Roma families keep a goat.

There is a large-scale unemployment in the village. Most of the local people who had worked in the industrial enterprises in Sliven have been unemployed for several years. Roma, however, are in the worst situation.

### **3. Detailed report from participant observation studies and from the interviews with “experts”**

#### **Nadezhda ghetto**

##### **A. Family structure in the Nadezhda ghetto:**

According to the researchers' observations Roma families in the Nadezhda neighborhood are the largest among all the rest from both urban and rural communities included in the study. The average number of individuals in one Roma household there is 9.2, compared to 2.3 individuals per household in Bulgaria, according to the data of the National Institute of Statistics.

Hardly 10% of the inhabitants of the neighborhood live in small families (from 2 to 4 members) or alone – mainly very young people, newly married couples or adults, whose children are married and have their own households. 15% of the families have 5 members, 31% have from 6 to 9 members, another 13% have 10 members and the rest 31% of the families have more than 10 members. It has to be pointed out that the largest families in the neighborhood rarely own bigger than two-room dwellings.

The large number of family members is due to the high birth rate in the neighborhood, as well as to the poverty of the Roma community, which makes it impossible for young families to live separate from the parents. In the conditions of economic crisis, large scale unemployment and insufficient income families can survive only by joining the efforts of all their members: the pensions of the adults, the allowances for children under the age of 16 years, the social benefits for unemployed and for heating in the winter months, the casual income of men and the income from purchasing scrap, as well as everything else the family members can find, steal or earn.

More than half of the respondents (56%) declared that they have contracted civil marriage. The rest live together with their partners in more or less permanent relationships, but without marriage. The latter refers to the so-called “traditional marriage”, which is typical among the Roma community and most widely spread among the youngest representatives – those between the ages of 18 and 30 years. In the communist period there has been a serious administrative, party and economic pressure against Roma, which made them register officially their marriages. Now such pressure does not exist. State employees working among Roma explain the fact that the latter do not contract civil marriages with their traditions, with their “lack of moral” and with the attempts of Roma women to get advantage of the statute of deserted mothers. Roma themselves are reluctant to talk with strangers about their marital status. They usually consider the official registration of the marriage a useless formality. There were also a few cases – hardly 7% - when the respondents declared that they had a second or a third marriage.

Roma in the Nadezhda neighborhood usually marry within their own group or community. There are rare cases of Turkish Roma married for “musicians”. The respondents definitely denied any possibility for them to get married for representatives of the “naked” Roma or for Bebrovski or Gradeshki Roma. In the course of the fieldwork the research team did not register such a “mixed” family. “Naked” Roma are the most isolated sub-group in the ghetto, however, sometimes they marry for Roma from the villages of Topolchane or Sotirya.

The early marriages and the comparatively high number of children are typical for all Roma sub-groups in the ghetto. According to the present study the Roma, who identify themselves as Turks, have a comparatively small number – 2-3 - of children per family. Most of the families from the sub-groups of “naked” and Gradeshki Roma have 4-5 children per family. Unlike Bulgarians and the rest of the minority groups in the country, where women usually give birth to their children at a comparatively early age – up to 25 – 30 years – and after that start using contraceptives in order to avoid pregnancy, there are still frequent cases of Roma women, who continue to give birth to children during the whole period of fertility.

The percentage of individuals living with their spouse is very high - 87%. More or less the same is the number of people living with their unmarried children. The percentage of people living with their married children is also high – 36% - in comparison with the average for the country. Here we find the biggest number of households among all the studied groups, in which young families can not afford to live separate from the parents. 41% of the respondents live with their grandchildren or with their grandparents! There are also many cases of people who live in one and the same house with their brothers and sisters, their children and spouses - a bit more than 25%. Obviously under the conditions of crisis the model of nuclear family turns to be economically inefficient for Roma in the big ghettos. The community goes back to their traditional mode of surviving within the framework of the expanded household and kinship.

Almost all of our respondents answer that women do the entire housework. Only 1% answer that man do the main housework. These answers were given mainly by the old people who had remained alone or were living with the young family and whose energy was enough only for such kind of help as well as by men who insisted on declaring a sort of participation in housekeeping. When asked questions about housework, most of the women replied with laughter: “Who else if not the woman?” Obviously this is a deeply intrinsic stereotype internalized from generation to generation.

### **B. Birth rate in the Nadezhda ghetto:**

The birth rate among the Roma community is still the highest in the country. During the communist years there was a Decree for Encouragement of Birth, according to which mothers were allowed to receive social allowances for giving birth and taking care for their children for a period of three years at the amount of the average salary in the country. According to this Decree if a woman has worked for at least 7 days, she had a right to receive a paid maternity leave for 45 days before the birth of the child and afterwards a paid leave for a period of 3 years. This period was equally included in her length of service. Mothers of many children (more than two) had a special privileged status. They had the right to retire after 15 years length of services, to use free of charge railway tickets; her children had free of charge access of the children kindergartens, etc. A large number of Roma women preferred to stay home and to give birth to several children instead of going to work.

According to Prof. Ivanichka Georgieva, who studied the everyday life and culture of the Bulgarian Roma in Sliven in 1966, “The modern Roma family consists of a father, a mother and two or three children at maximum... Wallachian Roma who have more than 9 children do not have permanent jobs and marry at a very early age...”

Although Nadezhda neighborhood was not encompassed fully by this study, Prof. Georgieva pointed out the difference in the family models between the families of Bulgarian Roma from Nikola Kochev

neighborhood - with two or three children - and those from Nadezhda - with their large number of children.

Nowadays the basic source of income for most of the Roma women suffering from mass and very long unemployment, is the social allowances for their children. 43% of the inhabitants of the Nadezhda neighborhood rely on social aid and children's allowances as a basic source of income for the family budget.

The number of children in our respondents' families is the biggest in the village of Sotirya and in the Nadezhda ghetto - respectively 4.6 and 4.3 children per respondent. 38.5% of the families in the ghetto have from 5 to 9 children!

The situation is similar for our respondents' grandchildren. Although 58% of the interviewed were at the ages between 18 and 39, it is interesting to mention that there is an average of 8 grandchildren per interviewed in Nadezhda ghetto. The big number of grandchildren together with the respectively high number of young people proves that Roma from the ghettos and villages still follow the tendency of early marriages and a family model of many children even in a period of crisis. 5% of the respondents in Nadezhda ghetto have more than 30 grandchildren.

Of special interest is the fact that most of the interviewed Roma declared that they would like to have 3-4 children at average due to the bad social conditions. Their answers were almost identical: "If I had money, I would have as many children as possible, but now - only 2-3". Many of the Bulgarians give similar answers: "If I had money, or if I lived in a western country, I would have at least two children - but now I don't want children at all". There is also a clear difference between the two ethnic groups as regards to their models of coping with the crisis.

During our study the research team often observed women and children with scarred faces and wounded arms and legs, sometimes hardly moving or chained to their beds. We often witnessed various forms of violence, which took place in front of us without any reaction on part of the people around. It was probably the third day of our field work in the ghetto, when together with the crowd of children around us there stopped a very young beautiful girl and started listening to our conversation with her neighbor. Then a young man approached the group, took the girl aside, started shouting at her in Romany and slapped her on the face so hard that she fell on the ground. Nobody around said or did something. Then he kicked her, said something rude, she stood up and they slowly walked away. After they went we asked the our respondents why did the man hit the girl, to which they indifferently answered that he was her husband and he had ordered her to clean the house, but she went "wandering around" instead, so he had punished her for being disobedient.

The research team often witnessed fights between boys in the ghetto, as well as between brothers and sisters, in which girls were always beaten even if they were older than their brothers. If there were no adults around the girls sometimes tried to strike back. However, when their mothers were there, the girls silently bore the punches. Mothers never interfered with those quarrels.

There were also frequent cases when small and bigger boys hit even their mothers or cursed them in front of everybody. In one of those cases the mother insisted that her son wash his legs, which were really very dirty. The boy refused to, but she finally took the pipe and started washing her son's legs. This made the boy angry and he started punching her on the back and on the head and shouted foul

words at her. In the same the mother laughing nervously at his reaction but did not say a word or punish the boy.

In another case we did not even understand why a small boy, at about three years of age, was started rudely cursing his mother. At first she was surprised and then proudly explained to her neighbors that her son was “so small, but already cursing like a man!”.

Several times we became witnesses of unequal distribution of food between the children in the family. In one of those cases a relative brought a dish full of baked aubergines for the children. Our respondents’ family had 6 children and there was not even bread in the house. At this time only the girls were in the room. Their mother stopped the interview for while, shouted something aloud and soon the boys ran into the house. They had the whole dish in front of the eyes of their hungry sisters, who did not even approach the table.

Finally, there was a case when our respondent’s small boy - 5-6 years old - got tired with our long interview with his mother and started complaining that he was hungry and wanted a wafer. His mother told him several times that she did not have money, but the boy continued crying louder and louder and started cursing her. The woman got worried and finally she climbed onto a chair and took 1 lev from behind a poster on the wall, which was the only decoration in the bare room. This was all her money, which she kept for bread. She gave it to her daughter and sent her to buy bread and a wafer. When we asked the woman if she is going to buy wafers for the rest of her children - all of them girls - she answered that she “pay them special attention too”.

### **C. Education in Nadezhda ghetto:**

Roma children from the Nadezhda neighborhood study in Bratya Miladinovi elementary school. It is located near the ghetto. The fact is very impressive that just opposite this old building, which shelters only Roma children from the Nadezhda ghetto, there is another school – comparatively new and much more hygienic and attractive – which pupils are only Bulgarian.

At present there is no boarding house at the school. Although most of the pupils who start school do not know Bulgarian, there are not enough preparatory classes for 6 years old children, neither enough extra classes for pupils with difficulties in their education. In the last two years – 1998–2000 – due to the financial support of the Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation – Sofia the school had two Roma assistant teachers, who worked with pupils in first class and in the extra classes. The school head master makes everything possible to keep the pupils at school. For several years now he has been in contact with non-governmental organizations from Sofia, which provided free of charge meals and clothes for the pupils, as well as the necessary equipment and teaching materials for the extra sports and arts classes.

However, since 1999 there have been difficulties in the fundraising and the provision of free of charge meals, which badly affected the school attendance. Parents are not only unable to provide any financial support for the school, but they are also extremely critical towards the school administration when it cannot provide enough funds for free of charge meals or teaching materials. They often blame the school administration for being corrupt and stealing the money for their children. In the same time, the donor foundation and the local tax offices have done a series of checks in the school on parents’ requests and they never found any financial offense.

The head masters of schools with many Roma pupils are convinced that in order to keep their pupils at school they have to offer some kind of vocational training, which would help them to find jobs when they finish their education. Such opinions often receive negative reactions on part of both the local authorities and Roma NGOs, which consider the offer for vocational training of Roma pupils an expression of a discriminative and racist attitude towards them. In Nadezhda school vocational classes in tailoring and wood-processing were opened at the schools after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In Nikola Kochev district in Sliven many parents raised the question for the establishment of new vocational classes like internal-combustion engines, public catering technology, etc. But there are technical schools in the town that offer such training and the local school is not allowed to implement the above-mentioned changes in its subject schedule. Up until now all the requests of the school director to use equipment and teachers from the technical schools were refused. According to municipal and ministry authorities it is better for Roma pupils to continue their education together with Bulgarians in the schools downtown of Sliven. Roma parents, however, sometimes complain that in such schools their children often become victims of a discriminative attitude both on part of their classmates and of the teachers. Apart from this, the central town schools usually have higher requirements, which leads to additional discomfort among part of the Roma children and to their more frequent dropping out from school.

The Bulgarian educational system does not provide for the use of teaching aids and programs to fulfill the needs of various cultural and social groups. The curriculum does not allow for the fact that Bulgarian is not the mother tongue for many Roma children. There are large proportions of children who do not speak Bulgarian at home, too. At the moment, an insignificant number of 3-6 year-olds go to nursery school, where before most children learned Bulgarian to some extent and were prepared for school.

Parents usually explain this fact with the lack of money. The state officials, however, informed us that sometimes kindergarten directors refuse to accept Roma children. This is usually explained in two ways as follows: the reluctance of Bulgarian parents to send their children together with Roma to kindergarten and/or casual thefts done by Roma mothers whose children go to the same kindergarten. Both explanations show the racist tendencies among the Bulgarian society and part of the educational authorities. It has to be pointed out that the average kindergarten allowances of one-child costs the municipal budgets 1000 leva per year. The reduction of Roma children going to kindergartens is a mechanism for allocation of the public funds among the more well-to-do Bulgarian families at the account of the poorer Roma community.

Although the existing state regulations, the municipal councils more and more rarely allocate funds for preparatory classes at schools for 6 years old children, whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian. If we consider the fact that the linguistic incompetence is the basic obstacle for children's adaptation and success at school, as well as the extremely small number of Roma teachers in the country, it becomes clear that the state refuses to allocate the necessary funds for education of Roma children in particular. With the help of two NGOs in the last two years some of the schools with a large number of Roma pupils appointed young Roma - usually students in pedagogy or people with secondary education - as assistant teachers in the extra classes. Although the high evaluation of their work given by the Ministry of Education and the recommendations to the municipalities to allocate funds for the assistant teachers' salaries, hardly three of them were appointed at schools only on the territory of Sliven. Two of those assistant teachers work in the Nadezhda district school. The Ministry of Education also did not find it expedient to provide particular amounts from its own



budget for assistant teachers' salaries. In the present school year those salaries are covered by the Open Society Foundation in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian cultural model is dominant in the educational system. The textbooks on literature, history, etc., do not contain the slightest hint that Roma also live in this country. This is another factor which influences the lack of motivation for some Roma children to study.

In 1996 the Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation prepared a pack of 16 textbooks on Roma history and culture, which were highly evaluated by both the Ministry of Education and the observers of the European Community, who financed the project. The Council of Europe granted funds for qualification of teachers in the intercultural education program, using these extra teaching materials. A pilot project was held in 50 schools throughout the country and its results were presented at the Ministry of Education. The Ministry expressed its support for the project, but it still does not find it necessary to include at least part of these teaching materials in the mainstream curriculum. In addition, these extra textbooks are not intended only for Roma but for all the other children too and would have a significant role in the promotion of tolerance and in the gradual overcoming of the discriminative tendencies against "the others". These extra teaching materials have been used in the Nadezhda district school since the very beginning of the above project.

The head masters of the schools with predominantly Roma students are worried that the fact that parents will have to pay for the textbooks after the second grade can lead to a mass drop out tide among the Roma students if the principals and the teaching staff do not manage to provide them with textbooks. In the 1999-2000 school year the children will still use the old textbooks but since new curricula and textbooks are expected to be introduced, it will be extremely difficult for the teachers to keep the Roma children at school.

The school institution is the institution Roma is least interested in and that is why generally it is not associated with conflicts. Parents usually have nothing to tell about school. If they do not feel comfortable with the questions about their education or their children's education they rarely tend to put the blame on teachers. However, it should be noted that the most frequent complaints came from parents whose children study at schools headed by efficient principals who managed to find funds for various extracurricular activities and who provided free snacks for the children. They suspected the principals and the teaching staff of stealing the food intended for their children. Especially where the funds were not sufficient to buy free food for the children for the whole year the accusations on the part of the parents were very harsh. After I checked those cases with the donor foundations it turned out that no funds for food had been donated during the last months of the past school year, and as for the current school year, funds will be provided only until the end of the year. I tried to assure the parents that the school principals and the teachers who teach their children are honest people, but to no avail.

The educational level of the Roma in the ghetto is extremely low. It is even lower than the average for the Roma in the country. There is a strong relation between the level of education of the parents and children's attendance in school. None of our respondents and the members of their families in Nadezhda ghetto have higher education or at least vocational qualification. 29% of the adult Roma in Nadezhda (older than 17) are illiterate. 26% had completed their primary education (4<sup>th</sup> grade), but most of them are functionally illiterate. The share of people with elementary education (8<sup>th</sup> grade) is 35.4%. Only 9.5% have graduated from secondary school (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Quite similar is the educational status of our respondents' spouses. There are no individuals with higher education in the ghetto. More than half of the respondents' husbands/wives are illiterate or have primary education. Only 1% of them has secondary education.

There is small number of children from Nadezhda, who are accommodated in boarding houses or orphanages. According to our observations these types of schools are not very popular among the Roma in the neighborhood. There is also a legal problem regarding these schools - according to the law, only children who do not have alive parents or ones having a medical certificate proving that they need special care could enter them. However, most of the boarding schools accept children, who do not meet the above requirements. Besides, nowadays boarding schools and orphanages do not provide the necessary education for the children. Like every other sphere of life in Bulgaria these social institutions were badly affected by the crisis.

The resource group discussed the problems of school attendance of Roma children also with some state officials, as follows:

**L.Y. – Director of the Regional Inspectorate at the Ministry of Education and Sciences:**

*“30% of the population in Sliven municipality is Romany, i.e. 40% of children at school age, having in mind that Roma usually marry young and have large families. There are several schools with a prevailing number of Roma pupils as follows: H. Mina Pashov Secondary School and Bratya Miladinovi Elementary School in Sliven, the village schools in Sotirya, Topolchane, Banya, Karanovo, Seliminovo and Christo Smirnenski Elementary School in Nova Zagora. According to school data the total share of children that do not go to school is about 30%. This is due to various reasons. One of them is the lack of motivation for learning. Children come absolutely unprepared for school, sometimes even without speaking Bulgarian. Their parents prefer to use them as baby-sitters of the smaller kids at home or as assistants in begging and collecting garbage. There is lack of coordination between the social services and the school, although we permanently send them requests to allow social aids only to those families whose children go to school. In places where such coordination exists the number of children remaining out of school is very small.”*

**M.M. Director of the school in Nadezhda:**

*“In Nadezhda neighborhood we are happy to keep half of the Roma children at school - at least until 4th grade. This year we managed to gather more of them because the social services refused to allow social aids to those whose children do not go to school. However, we have many difficulties. Children come to school for a while, just to get a note for the social services, and then disappear. The same is repeated in the next month. Then they cannot study the lessons taught during their absence and finally drop out.*

*Turkish Roma usually stop their girls from school after 6th grade for it is time for them to get married. Boys very often stop their education at the age of 14-15 years and get married too.*

*Only a few children remain at school after 8th grade - about 10 every year. This year 3 of our students were accepted in technical schools.*

*The young and better-qualified teachers usually avoid the school in Nadezhda neighborhood I am doing my best to attract young specialists. The project **Let's Bring the Children Back to School***

*provided extra payment for the teachers in music, fine arts and sports involved in it. At least I managed to find excellent teachers in these subjects. Again through this project we provided new equipment for the school and free food for the pupils and for all the teachers. I'm trying to provide additional qualification for all teachers that are interested. But still, there are many old teachers who do not like the children and are careless of their work.*

*I usually do not allow myself to think that our pupils simply won't continue their education after 8th grade... In the last few years they achieved brilliant results in regional and national sports events. Up until recently pupils from our school were not allowed to participate in municipality music feasts, but at present our remarkable music band gained popularity and took part in a concert at the Army Hall. We hope that our success will gradually change both the prejudices against the school and the self-respect of the children and their parents, which will consequently lead to their better results in the other school subjects. The public success of our music band, the football team, and the tennis and chess players visibly changed parents' attitude towards the school. They became proud of their children and the latter, on their turn, started to come to school more regularly. We organize festivals on various occasions and sometimes even manage to film children's performances, which makes parents very happy. The two Roma assistant teachers help us a lot in the direct contact with pupils' families.*

*We are basically working with NGOs from Sofia. The International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations involved our school in its project **Let's Bring the Children Back to School** and we have successfully worked together for 5 years. We were also involved in the British Know-How Fund program for early crime prevention and street traffic regulations. The Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation provided us with their intercultural education pack with teaching materials in Roma history and culture. The same foundation also included us in its Roma assistant teacher's project. With the help of the two assistant teachers working in the school we managed to preserve our extracurricular classes. The above foundations provided training for our teachers. In the last 5 years the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations also provided free food for all the pupils and teachers, as well as teaching materials and sports equipment for the extracurricular classes”.*

#### **D. Residential conditions in Nadezhda Ghetto**

There are significant differences in the residential conditions between the various Roma sub-groups in the neighborhood. Most of the Turkish Roma have big two or three story houses, with water supply and sewerage, bathrooms and outside toilets.

The musicians have comparatively smaller houses, usually without water supply. Their houses are often overpopulated, but still they are equipped with the basic furniture - beds, a cooking stove, a cupboard, tables, chairs and sometimes even some old sofa. Most of the musicians also possess a black-and-white television and a radio. Their bathrooms and faucets are usually outside in the yard.

The “naked” Roma have extremely poor living conditions. Only a few of them have brick houses of one room, usually without windows and with roofs made of various materials at hand. Most of the families use one and the same faucet in the yard - the word 'faucet' has a conventional use here, because, actually, we are speaking of a pipe. More than half of the families does not even have an outside toilet. In most of the houses the number of beds is not enough for all family members. Apart

from beds, some of the families also possess a black-and-white television. Their small children usually go naked in the summer. Bundles of poor clothes are often piled up on the beds or in the room corners.

Most of the houses in Nadezhda neighborhood are small, with poor sanitary conditions, disrepaired and overpopulated. 31% of the interviewed have less than 20 sq. m. of floor area. Another 29% have between 21 and 40 sq. m. of floor area. 23% live in houses of 41 to 100 sq. m. of floor area and only 9% of the respondents have more than 100 sq. m. of floor area. The “average family” in Nadezhda neighborhood has 7.8 members, who live in a house of 46.7 sq. m. of floor area, or 6 sq. m. of floor area per family member. It should be pointed out that in many cases our respondents’ idea of a house corresponded to our notion of a cardboard box or a shack at best.

Nadezhda neighborhood is the only site include in the present study where no one of the interviewed posses any agricultural land or a private farm. Nobody in Nadezhda posses villa plot.

Another interesting aspect of our study concerns the availability of some basic facilities in the “houses”. All the questions in this part started with the remark that the answer should be positive only if there are such facilities in the house. However, people who had a toilet, even if it was in the yard, felt so privileged that they refused to give us a negative answer and insisted that their house was provided with the necessary facilities. According to the results of our study 37.6% of the interviewed families – mainly Turkish Roma - have running cold water in their houses. “Naked” Roma usually associated “running cold water” with the pipe in the yard used by 6-7 families! More than 2/3 of the houses we visited did not have water supply and sewerage. According to our respondents water pipes have been installed for years but they were blocked with garbage long ago, which was the reason for the lack of water. Garbage is thrown in enormous piles in the middle of the narrow streets and dogs, pigs and children scatter it to and from all the time. The back yards of the houses are used as toilets. The smell and dirt can be hardly described.

Only 1.1% of the houses have running hot water and again these are only houses of Turkish Roma. Only 30% have an outside toilet. It is hardly possible to speak about bathrooms in Nadezhda neighborhood. The researcher personally heard about only one house with a bathroom inside. The particular respondent belonged to the “Turkish Roma” and worked as a bodyguard, which very often corresponds, to killer in Bulgaria.

There is no central heating anywhere in the neighborhood. Nobody has local central heating.

Less than 1/4 of the interviewed families have a refrigerator. Even the storekeepers in the neighborhood do not have refrigerator cells or glass-cases. The resource group witnessed the following event: A merchant brought a stall on the street. Then he brought several sausages, minced meat, pieces of meat, etc. Flies immediately covered everything. It was disposed to the constant dust from the street (which was not asphalt-paved) and to the hot sun (the temperature was 40 C). A client approached the stall, took a piece of unpacked minced meat with his dirty hand, put it on something like a scale, and then added some more... Vegetables, most of them rotten, were put in crates on the ground.

Only 1/6 of the inhabitants of the neighborhood have a conventional washing machine. Hardly 2% of the interviewed have an automatic washing machine. None of our respondents from the villages has

an automatic washing machine. 40% of the interviewed in Nadezhda neighborhood have a black-and-white television set. Actually, TV sets are the most widely spread electric appliances in the neighborhood 3% of the respondents – from the sub-group of the Turkish Roma - have a telephone line.

#### **E. Social stratification, employment and social services in the Nadezhda ghetto**

There is a distinct social stratification in the ghetto. Turkish Roma are the best to do within the community. The blacksmiths and the musicians preserved their traditional crafts. In the late 50s and in the 60s some of the Turkish Roma became involved in the town industry as unqualified or semi-skilled workers. Up until then most of the married women from their community did not go to work. At present many of the households run their own business - usually retail trade and sometimes taxi services, iron processing and construction work. Their group is generally affected by the unemployment; however, most of the unemployed lost their jobs in the last 1-3 years. Compared to the other groups Turkish Roma have generally better education and professional qualification.

Musicians were also involved in industrial enterprises comparatively recently – as a rule in 60-s. Many of them used to work in various industrial factories in the town and in the summer holidays were hired as seasonal workers by the agricultural cooperatives or as musicians at weddings and village feasts. Nowadays only part of the families has preserved their traditional crafts of music and dancing. The group of musicians is badly affected by the unemployment. Some of them rely on summer seasonal work in the food industry. Others are temporary hired as general construction workers. Many families run moneylender's business - they lend money to naked Roma at an interest of 100% for the first month, 200% for the second and 400% for the third month. If the debtor does not pay off the money in time they beat him and his family to death. In the last year there were several undiscovered cases of murder of children and young people from the group of the naked Roma. According to one of the hypotheses, widely spread in Nadezhda neighborhood, these are cases of punishment against debtors. However, Roma leaders from the Nikola Kochev neighborhood prefer the version of murders on part of Bulgarian racists. Several other members of the above group are involved in another kind of 'services' - they fill in application forms about social aids of illiterate people for 1 BGL per application. This is a very profitable job as far the average number applicants for social aids reaches beyond 5000 individuals per month and the majority of them are illiterate. Others purchase clothes, gathered by naked Roma from the garbage and later sell them at second hand. According to our interviews, apart from the clothes they also purchase pieces of old bread, again gathered from the garbage, and sell them to village people as food for domestic animals. Social benefits are the basic income for a significant part of the group.

“Naked” Roma were last Roma sub-group involved in organized labor activities in the mid 60s. Most of them were hired as low-qualified workers in the sphere public cleaning services, street and sewerage maintenance, in the leather industry, the wool processing and the canning factories. At present almost 100% of the “naked” Roma are unemployed. They make their living by gathering scrap, beggary and social aid. Many of them gather their food from the garbage.

Only insignificant part of our respondents is competitive at the labor market. Although nearly 1/3 of them have some qualification, there are only a few who work on their specialty. Only 3% of the interviewed have between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> degree of qualification – mostly men from the sub-group of the Turkish Roma.

More than 140 of the interviewed (74%) declared that they have been unemployed. There is a small percentage of individuals at pensionable age, which is mainly due to the high mortality rate at early age (there are rare cases of individuals over the age of 55-60 years, although they look 90 years old). A significant part of the pensioners in the neighborhood are granted pension for health problems (individuals suffering from various chronic diseases or handicapped). 13% of the interviewed are pensioners. At least one member in 34% of the households in the neighborhood receives pension. Only 7% of the inhabitants of Nadezhda neighborhoods are full time workers. The proportion of those who work part-time is also very low - only 5%. Such low rates of employment have been observed only in the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane. Nobody from Nadezhda works in the cooperative sector.

26% of the unemployed in the ghetto have never worked. These are mainly young people and women. About 14% of the interviewed declared that they had been unemployed for more than 10 years. These are mainly middle aged women and men without qualification, who were discharged in the very beginning of the transition period. More than half of the unemployed – 52% - have been out of the labor market for a period of 5-10 years. 8% of the interviewed have been unemployed for 2-4 years and hardly 10% lost their jobs in the last year and still receive compensation for unemployment. A comparatively high percentage of individuals - 69.2% - are registered as unemployed in the labor office. This presupposes enormous problems for the municipality, which is not able to provide the necessary social assistance and benefits for these people.

Social aid and mother and children's allowances are the basic sources of income for 2/5 of the Roma from Nadezhda. 13% of our respondents make their living by occasional income. 3% of the households gather their income by purchasing scrap, herbs and mushrooms. A big part of the people from Nadezhda rely on the financial support of their neighbors. However, these are not loans from relatives and friends, but from the so-called moneylenders who sometimes require more than 200% interest. Only 15% of the respondents declared that their salary is the basic source of income for the household. None of the interviewed considered bank loans possible solution of their financial difficulties.

Only 2.2% of the interviewed think that their income is completely enough. Almost all the rest state that the money they earn is completely not enough. Only 6.4% of the interviewed did not need to apply for social support. Quite a lot of the people did not apply because they did not know whom to address or because they: "know that we will be always kicked off", others did not know if they had the right or not.

Here are examples from our interviews with social workers and local municipality employees as regards to Roma access to the social services and their job opportunities:

**M.T.: Chief of the Regional Office for Social Assistance:**

*"It is hard for me to define various social strata. Municipality population became very poor in general. Of course, this mostly applies to Roma... Those from Nadezhda neighborhood at least receive their social aids, while Roma in villages only get mother and children's allowances. Most of them make their living at the rubbish dump in Sotirya. Others live on begging or stealing. Some of the Roma used to gather lime blossoms and herbs, but in the last few years they rooted out the herbs and cut off the branches of the lime-trees, so now they are not a reliable source of income anymore."*

*Roma do not care about consequences - for example, they steal into cherry orchards at night, cut off the trees and take them home, where they pick the cherries and then use the branches as firewood. On the next year there are no orchards and nowhere to steal from."*

**K. P. - Chief Expert at the Labor Office:**

*"Up until recently Sliven was an industrial town with a well-developed textile industry, heavy engineering, glass and food industry and electrical engineering. In the last few years the municipality economy was ruined. Due to structural changes the working staff has been sharply cut without any possibility for alternative employment.*

*The real number of unemployed is much higher than the official figures show. For example, unemployed, getting on to the pension age, are not registered. People with secondary and high education usually do not register too. There is a widely spread conviction among Bulgarians that they don't have to register because only Roma receive social aids, anyway. Which is not far from the truth."*

**K. P.- Expert at the Labor Office:**

*"The unemployed from Nadezhda neighborhood and the villages are our biggest problem. The majority of these people have neither education, nor qualification. In 1997 we carried out a program for education and employment, based in the school in Nadezhda neighborhood. The participants passed the first degree of a literacy course. The results were poor. These people do not have motivation for work. When they register at the labor offices they do not expect to find a job. On the contrary, they know that we cannot provide them any, so they will keep receiving social aids. Social aids contributed to their complete loss of interest towards work.*

*At present we have two programs directed towards the unemployed - the Temporary Employment Program and the Winter Program. The Occupational Training and Unemployment Fund finance both of them. Winter Program is newer. It started in 1997."*

**S. T.: Chief Expert at the Regional Office for Social Assistance:**

*"We are working in accordance with the Decree for Encouragement of Birth and the Social Assistance Regulations. People have equal access to social aids irrespective of their ethnicity.*

*Usually, at the end of the year - in November - the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy provides additional funds for social assistance. Recently we submitted a report at the Municipality Council and at the Mayor's Office on the shortage of funds for social assistance. I don't believe that the budget will be up-dated, however, we are obliged to prepare the report. We also sent a copy of it to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, together with a request for additional funds.*

*Now the municipality does not have money and does not pay children's and mothers' allowances in the villages. They have not been paid since April. But attention should be paid to the fact that at the present moment Nadezhda neighborhood is among the prime priorities of the municipality especially regarding social help. There is the highest percentage of supported respondents."*

## **F. Health**

The personal and family health and the access to health services are among the basic problems of the Roma community. The mass impoverishment, the malnutrition, the permanent distress, the poor living conditions and the early and frequent births led to the sharp deterioration in the health status of Roma.

Roma from Nadezhda neighborhood have a very low health status. The mass gastric and intestinal diseases, as well as the outbreaks of hepatitis are something usual there in the summer. It also applies to the horrible skin eczema, widely spread among both children and adults, to which nobody pays any attention. There are also numerous cases of allergic and respiratory diseases - there is simply no air in the ghetto. Many children obviously suffer from malnutrition and protein insufficiency. Up until now the researchers have never seen the typical African picture of so many children with swollen bellies in our own country. A lot of babies suffer from rachitis. The fact is very striking that Roma children tend to be far below average height for their age - 7-8 years old Roma children do not look much different than 3 years old Bulgarian kids.

69% of the households have members suffering from chronic diseases. 1/6 of these individuals have a certificate for disability, but there are also many handicapped, who are not officially and do not have such a certificate. Almost every third of the respondents declared that there was a case of child's death in his/her family – in the majority of cases there was one and in some of them two children who died at a very early age.

Every tenth of the respondents has vaccinated only some of his/her children or has not vaccinated any of them.

Most of the interviewed have not heard about the health reform and did not know that they had to choose a GP. They did not know those unemployed, who are not officially registered, would not receive health insurance. In such case they would lose the possibility to receive free medical care and will have to pay for health services.

In Nadezhda neighborhood the resource group registered the highest number of people (almost every seventh) who visit doctor only in case of emergency compared to the rest of the sites included in the study. Most of the people make efforts to “avoid” illnesses through untraditional medicine. They usually use herbs or medicines “prescribed” by those who have already suffered from the same disease – their relatives, neighbors, or acquaintances. Aspirin is the most popular medicine in the ghetto. People take it for any kind of disease. A mother with three small children who had skin eczema proudly declared that they did not need doctors at home and that she treated her children with aspirin!

The number of individuals who used the services of a dentist was the lowest in Nadezhda neighborhood compared to rest of the sites included in the study. Here the resource group also registered the highest number of cases when medical help was refused to individuals with health complaints. Almost 90% of the interviewed declared that they were cases when they could not buy the necessary medicines. It should be mentioned here that Roma often consider cases when they are required to pay for some medical test (x-rays, etc.) or for medicines a refusal on part of the particular doctor to treat them.



Many of the Roma consider it an expression of racism when they are required to pay for medical consumables, surgery, or consultations. Actually such “racism” affected everybody who needed medical services in our country in the last few years.

In the last few months the hospitals in many municipal centers did not have money to provide meals for their patients and feeding was left to patients’ relatives and friends. During our study- at the end of August – the municipal hospital in Sliven did not have such a problem. However, it has already had a DM 2500 debt, spent for the provision of free of charge medicines for socially disadvantaged, so probably now all medicines and meals at the hospital are paid by the patients. This will sharply decrease Roma access to medical care.

**Dr. Zh. M. – half Roma, doctor in Nadezhda neighborhood for 9 years:**

*“There is specific ghettoization of Nadezhda neighborhood, which leads to the isolation of Roma community and creates the majority of its problems. The basic reason for numerous diseases in the neighborhood is its overpopulation, as well as the dramatic poverty and the bad living conditions of its inhabitants. Many of them live in shacks, dens, some kinds of wall-surrounded places that can hardly be called houses.*

*There are three major Roma groups in the ghetto: naked, Turkish and musicians. Each of them is characterized with its typical diseases. Naked Roma are the most numerous group. The rates of infant mortality in it tend to go up gradually. They usually marry within the group, which is the reason for many hereditary diseases. Naked Roma most frequently suffer from tuberculosis, chronic hepatitis and dysentery. I had several patients' suffering from muscular dystrophy. Turkish Roma and the musicians often suffer from cardiovascular diseases. There are also frequent cases of miscarriages followed by usual complications. They are mainly due to alcoholism, poor hygiene and permanent beating of pregnant women.*

*I have been working in the ghetto for 9 years and I could see the drastic deterioration in the health status of my patients and their families. Babies were dying in my hands while I wasn't able to do anything to save their lives. Honestly speaking, everybody in the ghetto is sick, but medical treatment is a luxury that people there cannot afford.*

*The reform will lead to the mass withdrawal of Roma from health services. 90% of people in the ghetto are unemployed, but only half of them are officially registered at the labor offices. The rest will not receive health insurance. Those who work usually get a minimum salary, which would be hardly enough to provide for the health insurance of the unemployed members of the family and the children. This would be simply impossible.*

*When I send my patients to the hospital in Sliven, I usually tell them in advance to take their own underclothes and linen. Then I do my best to arrange their free treatment, using connections, explaining the situation in details, bothering people... I'm not sure that this will help again next year.*

*Only part of the Turkish Roma and the musicians can afford to pay for their medicines and treatment. There are also some that used the services of the private clinic. The price of a consultation there is 10 BGL.*

*Our staff consists of neighborhood physicians, a pediatrician and a gynecologist. There is no dentist, a neurologist, a cardiologist or a nephrologist and in cases in such need we send our patients to the Polyclinic N3."*

**Dr. P.T. - Chief of Pediatric Ward in N1 Polyclinic:** *One of the most severe problems is unemployment, which brings all the consequences of poverty - malnutrition and especially protein insufficiency; chronic diseases, etc. The diseases characteristic of our region are as follows: renal disorders, various kinds of allergy - asthma, bronchitis, as well as the various malformations with the prematurely born babies. Those babies are often abandoned in orphanages without any signature certifying parents' will that the child is left for adoption... There are cases of tuberculosis among Roma children; recently there was such a case in Sotirya village. The basic problems of Roma arise from their early marriages and the mass unemployment and poverty. One should see the number of families in Sotirya who make their living on the rubbish dump! Their general health knowledge is at very low level. The infant mortality rate is very high in their community. Roma often suffer from chronic hepatitis due to chronic malnutrition, domestic alcoholism, tobacco smoking since very early age and the glue they use to inhale. There are a lot of young mothers, especially from minority communities. They become mothers at the age of 13-14 years when they are still children themselves; this is why the babies are usually prematurely born. Young mothers rarely have any health knowledge or physical and financial possibility to bring up healthy children. This is the basic reason for the frequent children diseases.*

### **Nikola Kochev district in Sliven**

#### **A. Family structure in the Nikola Kochev district**

The families in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are comparatively big - the average of 5.6 individuals per family (which is two times bigger, compared to the average of 2.6 individual per family for the whole country, and two times smaller, compared to the average of 9.2 individual per family in the next Roma neighborhood in the town – “Nadezhda”). Life within a big household was typical for the neighborhood up to the middle of the century. During the communist period the nuclear family became dominant among the Roma from this neighborhood Nowadays we could notice again a return to the expanded household due both to the impossibility for the young families to separate in their own home and to the necessity small incomes of more people to be accumulated in the name of the family survival. The average number of household members in “the Jungle” reaches 7.9 individuals.

The family model of the “Bulgarian” Roma from Nikola Kochev neighborhood is very close to this of the Bulgarian working class. Men typically regard themselves “head of the household”. They are expected to provide for the family. At present the unemployment rut this traditional model to test, which caused serious frustration among men. As a result of this the death rate among them sharply increased, even in the group of the 40-50 years old. The most frequent cause of death among men are cardio-vascular diseases.

The majority of Roma women also worked – mainly in the textile industry, or as servants in well-to-do Bulgarian families before the establishment of the communist regime in the country. After that, during the communist regime, most of them moved to the developing industrial enterprises in the town. At present a significant part of the Roma women are unemployed.

Both men and women in the neighborhood consider unemployment and poverty their basic problem, which is impossible to cope with. They are also pointed out as the main cause for family conflicts.

### **B. Health status and access to health services in the Nikola Kochev district**

The results of our interviews show that Roma from the Nikola Kochev neighborhood have a low health status wherever, typical of poor people. 57% of the respondents declared that there were chronically sick members in their families - two members per family in half of the cases. In the Jungle their share is even higher – 68%. There are frequent cases of cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, kidney diseases, cancer, hepatitis and gynaecological diseases. In 17% of households there is a handicapped member - most frequently of a third degree (this means that they are still able to work and often deprives them from pension for handicapped). The resource group registered handicapped people in 31% of the families, living in the Jungle. In contrast with the situation in Nadezhda neighborhood all the children in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are vaccinated.

### **C. Level of education and access to school in the Nikola Kochev district**

At the border between Bulgarian and Roma neighborhoods there is a school where the majority of the children from Nikola Kochev neighborhood study. It is a high school (up to 11<sup>th</sup> grade). According to the data provided by the school director 75% of the students in the school are Roma and the rest are Bulgarian. They are children of workers. The better-educated Roma and the Bulgarians prefer to send their children to the other schools.

In order to guarantee the presence of the children in the school, the head master managed to provide free of charge snacks for the students with the financial support of the Open Society Foundation and the Caritas Foundation. However, this grant finished last year and there are no snacks in the new 1999/2000 school year. The fact that only this school and the one in Nadezhda ghetto do not have computer equipment makes an unpleasant impression. The rest of the town schools are sponsored by the parents and the school boards and are provided with computers and other necessary school equipment.

The school provides an opportunity for vocational training. Part of the students after 8<sup>th</sup> grade study banking as an additional subject. But they are not given a certificate and this makes it useless. Many parents raised the question for the establishment of new vocational classes like internal-combustion engines, public catering technology, etc. But there are technical schools in the town that offer such training and the local school is not allowed to implement the above-mentioned changes in its subject schedule. Up until now all the requests of the school director to use equipment and teachers from the technical schools were refused. There are evening classes enabling the young people who were married early to continue their education, and those who wish could follow them as private students.

The educational level of the people living in Nikola Kochev neighborhood is much higher than the average for the Roma in the country. There are a lot of people with college and university education there and a lot of students in the high schools. This is not valid for the people living in “the Jungle”. The last few years, however, there was a serious increase in the number of dropouts from the neighborhood school.

Two tendencies are observed among the “Bulgarian Roma” in Nikola Kochev neighborhood. There is a growing number of pupils dropping out from school, who come from the families of the former textile workers with primary and elementary education. This is mainly due to the financial problems of the parents. Secondly this is caused by the lack of motivation for further education. Parents are convinced that it does not matter if their children will complete elementary or secondary education – there are no jobs for a Roma! The number of students over the age of 16 years is falling down sharply. This is also related to the labor legislation. There are better opportunities for young people to find a job because employers are not obliged to cover social insurance. In most of the cases they do not even sign labor contracts with their employers. Another reason for the tendency among Roma pupils towards dropping out from school are the early marriages typical for the poorest part of their community.

Meanwhile the Roma elite (intellectuals, rich merchants and musicians) makes its best to give their children the opportunity to study in and to graduate from the most prestigious schools in Sliven. According to information gathered from NGOs over 100 young Roma apply for scholarships to continue their studies in universities and colleges after completing their secondary education.

The majority of Roma living in Nikola Kochev neighborhood speak Bulgarian at home. Most of the young people even do not know Romany. On the other hand, half of the inhabitants of the 'Jungle' speak only Romany at home. There are no Roma teachers in the neighborhood school and lack of knowledge of the official Bulgarian language seriously hampers children's adaptation to school. In the same time there are two unemployed Roma teachers in the neighborhood who speak Romany.

**N.B. – school director:** *Many of our problems are due to the growing poverty of population. Parents are either unemployed or migrant workers and in such cases all their efforts are directed towards the immediate survival of the family instead of towards the education of their children, which are often left without any control. They travel everywhere. Some try to find seasonal jobs at the sea resorts - selling underwear, fruit and vegetables, and whatever one can think of; others work as musicians in pubs. There are people who travel to Turkey where they buy cheap stuff, which is later sold in different parts of the country. Some are hired as seasonal workers in Greece. No matter where they go to, the problem is that they do not have time to take care of their children.*

*We often have conflicts with representatives of the Regional Department of the Ministry of Education who refuse to understand that our school is not a common one. They think that we just have to go to the classroom, tell our lesson and then check pupils' knowledge as it is in Bulgarian schools. But in our case pupils first have to be taught to speak Bulgarian, to behave appropriately, to remain in class and to avoid fighting, cursing and spitting at each other during the lesson and only then can we try to attract their attention with things far, far away from their everyday life and eventually give them knowledge...*

*We have a problem with vocational training. Part of our students study banking as an extra subject for which they are not given a certificate. Many parents raised the question for the establishment of new vocational classes like internal-combustion engines, public catering technology, etc. But there are technical schools in the town that offer such training and we are not allowed the above changes in our subject schedule. Up until now all our requests to use equipment and teachers from the technical schools were refused. On the other hand our students are often afraid to continue their*

*education after 8th class in a different school because of the bad attitude of the other children towards them...*

*In our case we basically rely on the work of the teachers during the lessons. Parents rarely pay any attention to their children's work at home. This is why the selection of teachers here is very strict and I do not hesitate to dismiss anyone who doesn't work hard. I'm trying to establish a creative environment at school. We have a Club for creative work and public relations which members are mainly young teachers. They have a drama circle, a dancing group and a music band. The club organizes a Miss School competition for girls from the different grades. They developed a joint project with the Human Rights Project (a Sofia NGO) for school radio club. Many of the club activities are oriented towards the poorer students, which increases their motivation for work.*

#### **D. Residential conditions in the Nikola Kochev district**

The residential conditions in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are much better compared to Nadezhda neighborhood, although this is not so obvious if only the sample from the 'Jungle' is considered. The average family in the neighborhood has 11.6 sq. m. of floor area per person. According to 1992 census data about the population and the living area, the average Bulgarian citizen including Roma has an average use of 16.9 sq. m. The inhabitants of the "Jungle" have the average of 6.7 sq. m. of floor area per person – almost the same as in Nadezhda – 6.0 sq. m.

As a result of the widespread illegal building, a large number of Roma homes in the "Jungle" do not have sewerage facilities. As a whole 30% of the families in Nikola Kochev neighborhood do not have cold running water. Only 11% have permanent use of hot running water during the whole year. Half of the interviewed households have an outside toilet and 1/4 of them does not even have these facilities. 39% have a bathroom in the house and 23% - one in an additional building in the yard.

Houses here are better furnished. In the neighborhood 63% of Roma families have a refrigerator, 44% have a conventional washing machine and another 11% have an automatic one. 38% of the respondents have black-and-white television and 43% have a color television. 14% of them have a video and 35% have a radio-cassette player. Only 15% of Roma homes have a telephone line.

The situation in the "Jungle" is worse. One in three of the interviewed families there have its own refrigerator and a conventional washing machine. One in ten of families even possess an automatic washing machine. 1/2 of the households has televisions - 10 of them - color televisions and 5 - black-and-white. 1/4 of the families has radio-cassette players and 5 of them - a video and a telephone line. Three of the households possess cars.

#### **E. Employment and unemployment. Incomes and access to social services in the Nikola Kochev district:**

Although its high rates, unemployment in Nikola Kochev neighborhood and even in the 'Jungle' is not so long-term and mass as it is in Nadezhda neighborhood This is connected with the higher qualification of the people living there. Half of the respondents from Nikola Kochev neighborhood declared they are qualified workers. Nevertheless, only 26% of the respondents have a permanent job, half of them – in state enterprises. 16% of their wives or husbands also have a permanent job. 33% of the families have at least one member with a permanent job. 5% run private business. In 43% of the households there are some incomes from seasonal or occasional work, and 13% of the families

depend entirely on these incomes. In the “Jungle” 1/3 of the families rely on casual work and another 1/3 make their living by gathering scrap and herbs.

The chief of the Labor office describes the situation in Nikola Kochev neighborhood as follows:

*“It is hard for me to define various social strata in our town. Municipality population became very poor in general. Of course, this mostly applies to Roma. However, there are certain differences within their group. Those who live in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are old workers' families very well integrated in the town community. It is true that they were affected by the unemployment - most of them were textile workers, some with a very high qualification. However, they managed to cope with the present situation. Many of them became retail dealers. Trade runs in their blood. They keep most of the market stalls. Some of them run catering business at the sea resorts. Others carry on trade at the markets in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia. Situation is radically different for the Roma in Nadezhda.”*

Half of the respondents declared they were unemployed. 30% of them are not registered at the labor offices. 13% of the unemployed respondents from Nikola Kochev were dismissed during the last year. 14% have been unemployed from 2 to 4 years and 45% were not able to find work the last 5 to 10 years. 25% of unemployed have never been employed. One third of the families in Nikola Kochev neighborhood (and half of the respondents from the “Jungle”) receive social aid.

About 1/3 of the respondents declared that they somehow managed their households with the gathered income. 2/3 have submitted applications for social aid, half of which were not approved for various reasons - some of the applicants refused to take a job they were offered, others did not regularly register at the labor offices and the rest did not meet the requirements for social assistance. One in five of the interviewed asserted the rude and hostile attitude of the social workers towards Roma. Most of the respondents expressed their irritation from the frequent visits of social workers at their homes to check if they had started some work. In fact, most of the men are often hired as temporary workers and they usually cover this kind of income.

#### **F. Interethnic and intergroup relations in Nadezhda district**

Local Bulgarians have a different attitude towards Roma from the various sub-groups in Sliven. The best accepted group is the one of “Bulgarian Gypsies” living in the Nikola Kochev district. We often heard from local people that some several years ago, before the beginning of the economic crisis, Bulgarians almost completely accepted Roma from Nikola Kochev district as equal members of the urban community. Our landlady described these relations as follows:

*“Our uniqueness is in the fact that we are the closest in spirit to Bulgarians - we, Bulgarian Roma from Nikola Kochev neighborhood. My mother used to say that many Bulgarians worked together with her and my father. Once the mother of a Bulgarian guy said that her son would be accepted in a school or textile. But it so happened that he was not accepted. This was a dramatic event for the whole family. You see what Bulgarians have shared with Roma. These are not distant relations; they have used to share everyday joys and sorrows. They used to work together, to celebrate holidays together. All people from the neighborhood will tell you that they have more Bulgarian than Roma friends. Nowadays it is more difficult for young people to create such close relationships. But before we were together all the time. A big part of the local Roma speak the best Bulgarian of all Roma in*

*the country. What was important was this communication. Everyday contact hides a big potential and has positive influence.”*

It has to be noted that Bulgarian Roma speak Bulgarian language at home. The lack of language barrier helps their integration into the urban community. 84% of our respondents from Nikola Kochev neighborhood declared that they spoke only Bulgarian at homes. The rest of the interviewed – mostly Roma from the “Jungle” - speak Romany or Turkish.

In the last 10 years the relations between Roma and Bulgarians gradually deteriorated. Roma were badly affected by the economic and social crisis in the transition period. The high level of unemployment among Roma, their dependence on social assistance, the quicker impoverishment, the dropping-out of Roma children from school and the deepening economic crisis increased the interethnic tensions. Bulgarian Roma, who were almost assimilated in the previous period, now started to feel discriminated on ethnic basis. This is not a matter of interpersonal conflicts, but of general deterioration of the attitude against Roma in the whole country, which strengthening the negative stereotypes against them and caused isolation of all representatives of their community.

The racist Bulgarian press plays a significant role in this strengthening of the negative stereotypes and the establishment of a discriminative attitude towards Roma. However, there is yet another obvious factor for this in Sliven – namely the presence of an enormous Roma minority, more than half of which is already totally excluded from all social structures of the city. The image of the “naked Roma” has become a label for the “Roma in general”. The “Jungle” has become a visiting card of Nikola Kochev neighborhood

Roma from the neighborhood react differently to this changed situation. Part of them try to find individual salvation through moving to another neighborhood or carefully hiding their Roma origin. We were surprised that even Roma activists asked us to be careful not to mention by chance at the meetings with teachers and school head masters that their children, who study in prestigious schools in the town, are Roma.

Others try to influence positive changes in the attitude towards the Roma community through active interaction with the local authorities, active participation in the social, political and cultural life of the city. Most often these are high-educated people with good image among the local urban community. During the last 5-6 years they founded 26 Roma organizations. Their activists became candidates for the elections of local authorities as representatives of strong political parties, independently or backed by Free Bulgaria party of the Roma lawyer Roussi Golemanov (who, however, avoids declaring his belonging go to the Roma community).

Others, desperate with the long-term unemployment and the bad attitude towards them develop strong awareness of their “difference” and openly demonstrate their hatred towards the “Bulgarians”. They have serious conflicts with representatives of the various state and municipal institutions. The contacts with Bulgarians, which have been normal up until recently, now are reduced to the minimum and are accompanied by mutual suspicion and mistrust. This group is getting more and more isolated. Only the fear that they would be identified as “naked” Roma prevents them from deviant and self-destructive behavior.

Others find consolation in faith. In the last few years the influence of the Protestant churches in the neighborhood was sharply increased. Almost half of the Roma in Nikola Kochev neighborhood are fully devoted to religion, and the religious community is the only one which they keep permanent and close contacts with.

At the same time Roma from Nikola Kochev neighborhood demonstrate their deep rejection and contempt against those from Nadezhda ghetto and against the newcomers to the “Jungle”. Even a significant part of the Roma leaders do not want to work among the communities in Nadezhda and the “Jungle” and to lobby at the local authorities for the rights of the “naked” Roma. They are interested in the “naked” only when they could use them as an example of injustice and racism on the part of Bulgarians.

### **The village of Topolchane**

#### **A. Family relations**

The research team studied the family relations only in the isolated Roma neighborhood in Topolchane where the naked Roma live.

These relations are very paternalistic, conservative and traditional. Both men and women are convinced in the total superiority of the man. He is the bearer of reason, order, power and creativity. The woman, on the contrary, is associated with dark and evil spirits. That is why she has to obey the man and every expression of physical violence against her is justified. Many of our respondents provided similar explanations, even the local Roma pastors, who asserted that it would be a sin if men do not punish their wives whenever the latter are guilty.

Women do the main housework and are fully responsible for the children. Children are involved in the housework from a very early age - 5-6 years old girls are expected and required to clean the house, to help washing the clothes (which is usually done by hands and in the Roma community people usually have to bring water from distant faucets) and to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. Girls are taught from a very early age that they are not equal with their brothers. Although the interviewed mothers claimed that they gave all their children equal portions of meals, the research team witnessed many cases when families spent their last money to please the whims of the son, which deprived the daughter of a single slice of bread. Boys often act aggressively towards girls, even within the family. And girls are taught to submit to the violence. At home they often see the mother severely beaten by the father and start to accept it as something natural. Thus girls develop their behavior of victims of violence. Violence is accepted as universal law, inevitable part of the everyday life, which one cannot oppose to.

#### **B. Roma health status and access to health services**

There is a health center in the village with a young doctor and a doctor's assistant. The doctor travels from Sliven every day. Up until this year the staff of the health center also included a midwife and a nurse but they were dismissed due to the lack of fund for health care in the municipal budget. The doctor, the village mayor and the Roma women are very worried about this fact. There are usually at least 50 pregnant women in the village, as well as young mothers with small children who used the services of the midwife. Now, due to shortage of funds, they would be deprived of health



consultations for children and pregnant women. Up until recently the health center also provided dentist's services. Now the municipality stopped the salary of the dentist and he opened a private surgery.

According to Dr. Kostadinova there are several cases of death among children in the village every year, usually due to congenital diseases and premature birth. A significant part of the babies are born with weight below the standard and are continually sick as a result of the early and frequent births, together with malnutrition, smoking and domestic violence. At the age of 1-year Roma children usually weigh 7-8 kg, while Bulgarian children at the same age are normally 3-4 times heavier. Roma children frequently suffer from various respiratory diseases, as well as from traumas and poisoning. Every year there are cases of hepatitis among them. In summer they usually have diarrhoea. Kidney diseases are also typical for the village. There are many cases of goiter, which is due to the bad chemical composition of the water and to the lack of preventive measures in the last few years (some 10 years ago schools and kindergartens regularly provided iodine pills for the children). Lost of people in Topolchane suffer from diabetes.

There are frequent cases of progressive dystrophy of the muscles and hypotrophy. Older people from the village usually die from cardio-vascular diseases.

Half of the respondents described their health status as poor. All of them live in families with chronically sick members, who are children in every one in three of the cases. There are handicapped members in 12% of the households. There are a growing number of children without vaccinations - children in 14% of the households did not have vaccinations or re-vaccinations against poliomyelitis and diphtheria. 30% of the interviewed households had cases of children's death, with two such cases in two of the families each. This is the highest children mortality rate in all Roma neighborhoods we observed in Sliven municipality. The worst is that the increased infant mortality brings forth old fears among Roma and leads to even higher birth rate. Women, who have lost a child, used to say: "I give birth to more children in order to have equally for the death and for me". The community had returned to the traditional model of behavior, which was considered forgotten.

None of the interviewed had any information about the forthcoming health reforms. In cases of a serious illness people go to the Regional polyclinic N3 in Sliven, which is within 5 km of the village. Most of the respondents expressed their preferences for a particular doctor, however, half of them have never heard of the choice of a family doctor or about the health insurance. There is a good transport to the town. Buses leave from Sliven to the village in every hour, but the majority of Roma can hardly afford buying bus tickets.

More than half of our respondents goes to the town only in cases of emergency, otherwise, they treat their sick relatives at home. Only 16% use the services of a dentist. 17% of Roma declared that in the last year she/he or members of her/his family were refused medical care. Here again the interviewed declared similar cases to those described above, when patients were not allowed to a consultation in the same day, or were not accepted into the hospital without the necessary prescription from the polyclinic and when doctors from the emergency refused to visit the patients at home free of charge.

97% of the respondents had cases when they could not pay for the prescribed medicines. Only a few of them managed to buy part of the medicines and the rest did not follow the prescribed treatment at all. As a result of this members of 46% of the households were hospitalized after unsuccessful

attempts for domestic treatment. For the first time here the respondents declared cases different from our observations in Sliven. 10 of them had paid for both the medical supplies and the treatment itself. However, the resource group could not understand whether these people had to pay because they did not have a prescription from their family doctor, or for some other reasons.

Roma perceive the introduction of payment for the medical services, medicines and hospital services as a discriminative measure directed especially against them. The researchers were surprised to hear them openly speaking about their fear that doctors do everything possible “to kill them”. A 52 years old man with 4 alive children, one dead son, and 5 grandchildren, and who has experienced also the tragedy to loose a grandchild, was complaining that the pediatrician had accepted Bulgarians for consultation, while he and his daughter were waiting for him to see their sick child. His comment was the following: *“Racists! They want to kill our children! But we are clever, we make more children and never become less in number!”* Another man from Nadezhda ghetto gave the following answer to the question what did he do when the pediatrician didn’t pay proper attention to him and made him wait for a long time in front of the cabinet: *“What should I do? I kept silent, because instead of medicines, she could give me some poison!”* Thus poverty, hopelessness and rejection of Roma by the rest of the society made them feel endangered by the others and brought back the model of the large family as the only way for preservation of the community. This led to self-isolation from the dangerous “Gadjo” to the necessary minimum. The level of rejection of the “others” was observed in both directions - on part of Roma against Bulgarians, and on part of Bulgarians against Roma.

### **C. Roma level of education and access to school**

There is an elementary school (up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade) in Topolchane. The total number of pupils in the school is 270, although they should be at least 400. About 70% of them are Roma. In the last few years several Bulgarian families sent their children to study in Sliven. Every year about 30 children leave school, mainly as a result of poverty. When, 2 years ago, the local school provided free of charge snacks for the pupils (thanks to the grants of the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations) almost all pupils from the village went to school regularly. In the next year the school head master could not find donors to continue the provision of free of charge snacks and as a result 130 pupils stopped going to school.

The school head master also tries to raise funds for teaching materials, but up until now he only managed to provide old textbooks for all the pupils. The school engaged a sambo trainer and organized extra sports classes for its pupils. In 1999 the school sambo team won 2 place in the national sambo championship.

Roma pupils from the village have serious problems with the Bulgarian language education. According to the local school head master this is the basic reason for their bad results and early dropping out from school. In primary grade (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> grade) children study in separate classes - one for Bulgarians and Bulgarian Roma and the other one for the rest of the Roma. Most of the local Roma consider this an expression of racism.

Roma in Topolchane have a very low level of education compared to that of the inhabitants of Sotirya and Nadezhda neighborhood. Only 1.5% of our respondents have a secondary education and another 15% have graduated from elementary school. 26% of the respondents had primary education, and the rest 40% did not go to school at all or dropped out from school during the first three years of

education. The picture is similar for their spouses – 31% are illiterate, 37% have a primary education and 31% graduated from elementary school.

One of the local clergymen - a Roma with secondary education gave the following explanation of this fact:

*“The rate of unemployment is very high - hardly 3% of the people in the neighborhood have permanent jobs. We can’t educate the children, because there are simply no means to cover their needs. We can’t even buy them clothes and shoes, not talking about notebooks and textbooks. However, education is the most important thing nowadays.*

*Adults have very low education. In the past teachers were coming to our school only to take their salaries. They didn’t care much about pupils’ education. Roma pupils, in particular, have always been neglected. Teachers treated Bulgarian children in a different way - they weren’t allowed to be absent or to have bad results at school.*

*There are only 2 or 3 persons with secondary education in the neighborhood It is true that our parents were quite careless about our education - they probably thought that we would be fine with lower education too. Yes, parents are guilty too. Children used to shirk school and parents didn’t care about that, even when teachers visited their homes to complain from pupils.*

*30 years ago our people (Roma) couldn’t read and write. Such parents, who were illiterate but had some jobs and managed to earn their living, cannot be expected to realize that education might be important for their children. 12-13 years old children were considered labor power. Girls looked after their smaller brothers and sisters and boys worked together with parents... Now we can see that education is important, but we can’t afford it. I fill the application forms and document for social aid of 90% of the people from the neighborhood”*

25% of the local Roma families do not send their children to school. In two of these cases the parents explained that their children are not interested in school and the rest stated various reasons among which: the lack of money or the frequent illnesses of the child. Only 6% of the interviewed families send their children to kindergarten. The rest 46% families with children at the age between 4 and 6 years prefer to take care of them at home.

#### **D. Residential conditions:**

Some 5 years ago the Roma neighborhood in the village of Topolchane had pretty look. Nearly half of the houses were big and well kept. At present most of them are half-ruined. The owners destroyed their second floors and sold the construction materials in order to provide for their families. At present two to three families live in the small rooms on the ground floor. This led to an increase in the family conflicts.

Presently Roma in the village have the average of 5.2 sq. m. of floor area per individual (as opposed to the 16,9 sq. m. of floor area per individual in the average Bulgarian home, including Roma in the country, according to the census data). Only 4 of the 62 observed households possess more than 100 sq. m. of floor area. Nearly 10% of the households keep small cultivated gardens, where they grow

vegetables. 38% of the houses have water supply. Only one third of the families have a toilet – separate building in the yard.

10% of the families have their own refrigerator and a conventional washing machine. 6% of them possess a colour television, 46% - a black-and-white one, 4% - a radio-cassette player. There is telephone line in 2 of the households. The members of almost all of the families sleep in beds, although there are often 3-5 persons in one bed. Some of the households have still preserved their sideboards, wardrobes and other comparatively good pieces of furniture.

#### **E. Employment and unemployment. Incomes and access to social services**

A significant part of the Roma men from Topolchane have worked in the local agricultural cooperative and in the industrial factories in Sliven for many years, while part of their wives have been involved in the village cooperatives farm. 1/6 of our respondents (mostly men) has a professional qualification. At present none of the interviewed are still working in the town, and only 6% of their spouses preserved their jobs there. A small number of Roma are involved in the village cooperative - mainly as seasonal workers. A few work for local landowners, or for private farms in the nearby villages. In stead of cash they are often paid in flour, milk and vegetables. None of the interviewed declared they run a private business. In 23% of the Roma families there is a pensioner. 16% of the respondents declared that they or their husbands are often hired as seasonal workers for a different period of time. 1/4 of the families tries to provide additional income by purchasing scrap. According to 94% of the respondents their income cannot cover the basic needs of the household.

20% of the unemployed individuals are nor registered at the labor offices. The usual explanation of those who are not registered is that people in villages do not receive monthly social aids. It makes no sense to them traveling to town every month and declaring that they are unemployed, as far as it brings nothing. Nobody informed them that the new regulations provide for the health insurance of all the registered unemployed.

72% of the respondents receive social aid and in 51% of the families this is the main source of income. Most of these aids are just maternity benefits and social assistance for taking care of children. 67% of the families were granted temporary aids for heating 4 months during the winter. Another 20% received one-time aids. Only 5% of the respondents declared that they receive monthly social aids, all of them are deserted mothers. In several cases mothers are not granted children's allowances because they still do not have passports - they are under the age of 16 years.

The social worker in the village was appointed in March 1999. Before that he has worked in Nadezhda neighborhood for 6 years. He has applied to donor foundations for various projects aiming to create new jobs in the village. However, his efforts have been unsuccessful up until now.

According to information from the social worker, in the last year 360 families - 95% of which Roma - received various kinds of social benefits. In most of the cases there were children's allowances and temporary aids for heating in the winter months. More than 200 families from the village receive children's allowances from the Regional Office for Social Assistance, which shows that all parents in these families, are unemployed. Every month there are about 10-15 one-time aids for families in need. This kind of aid is usually in the form of canned vegetables, beans and rice. Our Roma respondents openly expressed their discontent from this type of social assistance. On the other hand

the local social worker is convinced that this kind of aid is very reasonable, because men usually use to spent all the money from social aids for alcoholic drinks. He gave an example of this, which the research group also witnessed during the last allocation of social aids in the village. Then all storekeepers from the village gathered in front of his office in order to get back their money from the people, who used to buy goods on credit. The rest of the money was immediately spent for alcoholic drinks and sausages and on the next there were no liquors in the village stores.

The local social worker asserted that most of Roma in the Topolchane were involved in various kinds of shadow business but they did not declare their real income. Local Bulgarians who have small carpenter's shops use to hire Roma for illegal felling of wood from the forest. A considerable part of the villagers use firewood for heating and it is also supplied illegally, for which Roma receive tiny amounts of money. Apart from this Roma also work in agricultural farms - mainly private ones - where they hired to dig and trim vine and to gather grapes and fruit. Some of them work without contracts in the local slaughterhouses. Many of the Roma gather and purchase scrap, herbs, hips and mushrooms.

In 1997 the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations granted to the newly established Roma cooperative *Romiko* in Topolchane an amount of 20 000 USD for buying of planting material for cultivation of 300 decares of municipal land. The land was granted on lease to the Roma for symbolic payment in order to mobilize the efforts of the community to cope with the crisis. According to expert data from the Labor office in Sliven at the end of the year the cooperative sold agricultural production to the value of less than 1000 USA vs. 20 times bigger investments.

Roma blame the chairman of the cooperative, the mayor and two leaders of the Joint Roma Union for the obvious failure of the project. There are different rumors about this case in the village, that could be summarized as follows: *"They took 100 000 USD for us from a foundation 'cause we are poor, and instead of giving us the money, they took it for themselves. On the top of it all, they wanted us to work for them. They are all cheats!"*

The leaders of the Joint Roma Union blame the mayor and the chairman of the Roma cooperative for being irresponsible and unable to work with people. Bulgarians, on their turn, consider the whole case *"Gypsy business!"* and comment how meaningless it is to waste money for people, who are doomed to fail projects, anyway. They tell that Roma from the village resisted strongly to the idea to cultivate land without regular monthly salaries, paid leaves in cases of health problems, and guaranteed income in the autumn. They claim that Roma steal vegetables from their gardens at the night and sell them at the markets in Sliven.

The problem is that after this unsuccessful attempt of Roma to create their own agricultural cooperative, Sofia NGOs became reluctant to finance such initiatives in the region of Sliven and a German NGO, which offered short-term loans to Roma organizations for opening new jobs for Roma, gave up working in Bulgaria after it had been looking for business partners and observing the activities of Roma organizations in the country for months .

The failure of the above initiative demonstrated various things. First, it showed the alienation of peasants (already observed and described by sociologists long time ago) from work in cooperative farms, which they do not feel their own property, but where they are just follow other people's will. During the socialist period the notorious diligence of Bulgarian peasant was lost, and stealing of

agricultural production from the field ceased to be perceived as theft. In their attempt to create a cooperative of their own Roma reproduced this stereotype. They demonstrated again how spoiling and unfruitful were both the guaranteed incomes for products of low quality and the irresponsible attitude towards work without personal engagement and initiative.

At the same time the lack of experience of the local Roma NGO in self-organization and taking responsibility for their local community became obvious. Roma are even less inclined to take civic initiatives than Bulgarians. For many decades now every self-initiative of people has been met with suspicion and hostility. The communist party was always the main initiator and leader of people's activities. This made Bulgarians forget how to take responsibility as citizens. There are also other factors which contributed to the loss of interest and motivation on part of Roma to participate in public initiatives - namely, their lack of experience in civic participation and the strong tendency towards concentration of all activities only within the family. Having always lived in alien and hostile environment, they have survived not as part of the society, but as a family.

On the other hand, local Roma leaders proved to be unable to create motivation in their target groups to cooperate in joint activities. Roma NGOs and their leaders are usually alienated from the people they claim to represent. This makes them vulnerable. Even when they are led by idealistic motives, they are often blamed by the rest of the community that they work only for their own profit. By the way, this problem is not restricted only among Roma organizations.

#### **F. Interethnic relations:**

Topolchane is a typical example for unsuccessful social policy towards Roma. The communist government claimed that it had uprooted poverty and created conditions for homogenization of the society and fair allocation of resources on the principles of justice and equality. All evidences for the hypocrisy of these statements had to be covered. The problems of poverty were not even conceptualized in scientific literature. Social stratification was not studied. A lot of efforts were made to hide the truth about people's poverty and the miserable living conditions in Roma neighborhoods.

For this reason in some of the bigger cities in the country - Sliven, Kazanluk, Plovdiv, etc. Roma neighborhoods were surrounded with 3 m high walls. This was also the reason for the forced migration of Roma from the 28 biggest regional centers to the neighboring villages. It started with the internment of the most "unfit" - beggars, drunkards, as well as those who did not send their children to school. However, the isolation of these people in satellite villages did not lead to their re-integration into the society. On the contrary, this only deepened their problems. They were accommodated in dwellings that rarely met any hygienic standards. They were expected to start "socially useful labor", but in most of the cases the particular village did not offer attractive possibilities for people who had never done agricultural work in their life. The living minimum guaranteed by the maternity benefits and children's allowances, by the free of charge education and medical care, as well as the possibilities to steal from the agricultural production of the local cooperatives without any consequences, strengthened the syndrome of "habitual helplessness" among Roma.

Peasants regarded the "newcomers" lazy and irresponsible parasites. This negative attitude gradually deepened and became directed towards the whole Roma ethnic community.

In the last few years the large-scale unemployment badly affected people from the satellite villages, the communist cooperatives were closed, the land was returned to its previous owners and Roma in the villages became extremely vulnerable. Unemployment among them reached extremely high rates. Bulgarians did not regard them as good workers and refused to hire them in agricultural cooperatives. Left with no income, a big part of the rural Roma started stealing part of the agricultural production from their fellow villagers. This aggravated the relations between the two ethnic communities. Before Bulgarians also used to steal from agricultural cooperatives but the latter were considered nobody's property. On the contrary, stealing from personal property was always regarded a sin. Nowadays Bulgarians refuse to perceive that Roma steal because of their extreme poverty and by force of habit, and started insisting that Roma should leave the villages.

The stereotype for Roma as thievish and lazy is very strong among Bulgarians in Topolchane. The social distance between the two ethnic communities has drastically increased. Bulgarians do not even try to memorize the names of their Roma fellow villagers. They look with fear and contempt to the processes of impoverishment, marginalization and criminalization among Roma. The increase in birth rate among the poorest families that cannot afford to educate their children is perceived by Bulgarians as drastic manifestation of irresponsibility, animalism, irrationality and primitivism. The following statement is representative for the attitude of local Bulgarians towards Roma: *"They are like animals! They don't think what they do at all. They marry young and have many children like mice. They don't want to work at all and don't educate their children. They've been thought to live at somebody else's expenses and only complain that the social help is not enough. How can they just lie in bed all day long and do not even dig a cesspool in the house yard? Why do they destroy their houses instead of start working? Why even our 80 years old women can cultivate their orchards and feed cow, hens and pigs alone, but they - all young people - live in the dirt like pigs and do not grow even vegetables and beans?"*

More and more rarely the managers of the village cooperative hire Roma as agricultural workers. More and more rarely Bulgarians offer their Roma neighbors some temporary job in their private farms. This change in the attitude is very painful for the "old" Roma whose ancestors were among the first Roma settles in the village.

Roma, in turn, also isolate themselves and develop hostility against Bulgarians. They already use the word "Bulgarian" as a synonym for a "racist". They are convinced that Bulgarians are 100% responsible for the difficult situation of the Roma community as a whole. They refuse to accept the new social stratification and changes in the macrosociety. Big part of them refuse to work for Bulgarians at the minimum payment they offer. As an example they quote wages for gathering oranges in Greece, forgetting the fact that the two countries differ in their living standards. More and more often one can hear aggressive statement of the following type: *"It is not fair that you have something and I don't! It is not fair that you eat and my children are starving! If it is necessary, I will hit you and will take what you have to give it to my children!"* Sometimes this exactly what Roma do. Mayors complain that in the last few years robberies and attacks against lonely old people have become more frequent, especially in the outskirts of the villages. Many of our respondents also shared the similar experience.

## **The village of Gorno Alexandrovo**

### **A. Roma education**

The elementary school in Gorno Alexandrovo provides education for about 60 pupils. 15 to 16 children below school age go to the local kindergarten. Practically all the children in the kindergarten are Roma; there are only 1 or 2 Bulgarian children. About 15 years ago the local school was mixed. At present, due to the migration of young Bulgarian families to the nearby towns, there are almost no Bulgarian pupils in the school.

Because of the small number of pupils the school has combined classes, in which the different grades study together as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>; 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. This created serious difficulties for the process of education. There is suggestion that school should be transformed into a primary one (up until 4<sup>th</sup> grade) and the bigger pupils should travel to the nearest elementary school in the village of Blatets. The interviewed parents were very worried about this perspective and asserted that if this happened they would stop their children from school. They cannot afford to cover the necessary transport costs and are not inclined for security reasons to let their children travel alone every day to another village.

Teachers in the local school live in Sliven and travel to the village every day by bus. Although under contract the municipality is obliged to cover their transport costs this obligation is not observed due to the shortage of funds in the municipal budget. Thus, teachers spend more than 1/3 of their salaries for transport.

Again because of the small number of pupils the municipality is not able to provide qualified teachers for all the school subjects. This is why the teachers cover 2 or more subjects, for example, the specialist in mathematics also teaches physics, chemistry and biology; the historian teaches also geography, etc. Local teachers do not receive extra payment for their additional efforts. Their salaries are equivalent to about 70 \$ per month.

The school building is very old and looks clean and nice, although has not been repaired for a long time. Its classrooms are not equipped with special teaching materials on the different school subjects, which are necessary to make the process of education more attractive for the pupils. It hardly provides even textbooks. The school head master and the teachers do their best to provide at least used textbooks from the town schools.

There are also problems with the heating in wintertime. In the beginning of the school year 1999-2000 the village mayor and the teachers gathered their own money to buy firewood and the pupils' parents helped cutting the firewood for free. Last year the school head master organized the pupils and parents and they went together to the forest to cut firewood.

The pupils are well mannered. According to their teachers there are no hooligan acts in the school, pupils do smoke cigarettes and do not inhale acetone glue (a widely spread addiction among Roma children in the bigger towns).



Teachers keep close contacts with their pupils' families. They pay visits at their homes at least once a month and discuss with parents the results of their children at school. They managed to gather at school 90% of the children in Gorno Alexandrovo. The primary teacher has worked in the village for 27 years. She taught many of the parents of her present pupils.

There are no frequent cases of absence from school without a serious reason. When pupils are absent without notification, teachers visit their homes to find out what happened. Usually it refers to various family reasons: the family traveled to another village to attend a wedding ceremony; a kid or a calf was born in the farm, which attracted everybody's attention and the child forgot about school, etc. However, according to the school head master about 20% of the children drop out from school after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Those are mainly girls who get married at an early age. About 20-25% of the school graduates continue their education in Sliven or Yambol.

The school head master and the teachers consider that their pupils are well educated. Up until 4<sup>th</sup> grade they already know reading, writing and basic arithmetics. *"After that we simply keep them in the warm classrooms and maintain their reading skills, while writing usually gets worse with the age. The contents of the school subjects – like physics, chemistry and biology – are not adequate to the abilities of our children. They have a lot of difficulties. Many times they cannot comprehend the subject at all. Thus they lose motivation. I try to teach them the basic things and tell the rest like a story, but they still do not understand. Almost all of them drop out from school after 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I don't know if Bulgarian children manage to cover all school subjects – they are vast, difficult and too scientifically presented."*

Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo have a higher level of education compared to our respondents in Nadezhda neighborhood and in the rest of the villages. Their level of education is lower compared to that of the Bulgarian Roma from Nikola Kochev neighborhood in Sliven. This is a result of the really good integration of Roma in the village society. Only few children from the village have continued their education in Sliven, Stara Zagora or Yambol.

Less than 1/4 of the Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo do not have primary education or are completely illiterate. It is true that there are no people with special qualification or university degree. 12% of our respondents have secondary education. 32% have elementary education; the same percentage people have primary education. The educational level of our respondents' husbands/wives is slightly different. Almost 42% of them have elementary education and only 7% have graduated from 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Every tenth person went to a boarding school. Usually these are also comparatively better educated people - they have at least elementary education. Therefore, the share of children who study in this kind of schools now is relatively big - every twentieth - although their number is significantly reduced (due to the deteriorated conditions in the social institutions in Bulgaria).

Every fifth of the interviewed Roma has some qualification. 15% have qualification up to 5<sup>th</sup> category. In most of the cases qualified Roma are men.

45% of the interviewed claim that they do not have children at school age. Almost half of the interviewed send their children to regular school at least up to 8 grade. 30% have children who do not attend school or attend it irregularly. *"We don't have money, neither soap, we can't send them to school barefoot and naked"*, *"I stopped them from school because my children grew up and should study in Sliven or Yambol, but we do not have money for this"* – this is how our respondents usually

replied when asked why the children did not go to school. Another typical explanation is that Roma children start working at an early age. The village of Gorno Alexandrovo has the highest percentage of working children under age of 18 years, compared to rest of the sites - 10%. Every fifth Roma family in the village with children under school age send them to kindergarten.

Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo do not have linguistic problems. Most of them speak mainly Bulgarian, even at home. Only a few old men had problems to understand immediately everything we asked them. As a result of their good knowledge of Bulgarian local Roma children well prepared to start school and they rarely drop out during the first 4 years of education.

## **B. Residential conditions**

Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo are very well integrated in the local village community. They do not live in a separate neighborhood, but are dispersed in the endmost parts of the village. They possess relatively nice houses, and have 8.7 sq. m. of floor area per person on the average. Most of the Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo have a one-storey house and an additional building with two rooms - one for the old parents, and another one used as a cellar.

Roma houses in the village are situated across a ravine and a hill. The research team found about twenty houses there, at a considerable distance from one another. These were typical one-storey houses with vegetables in the yard and domestic animals in the farm. Although the limited family budget the homes were clean, tidy and even cozy – similar to those of Roma in Nikola Kochev neighborhood in Sliven.

Roma homes in this village usually have 50.7 sq.m. of floor area. It is two times bigger than the living space of the respondents in Sotirya, and smaller compared only to Nikola Kochev neighborhood

15% of the respondents have their own farms and yards of between 100 and 500 sq. m., where they grow vegetables and keep their domestic animals. In Gorno Alexandrovo is the biggest share of Roma who own a personal farm, where they grow vegetables for family use.

32% of the interviewed possess a horse carriage. If we use this indicator to compare rural Roma communities in Sotirya and Gorno Alexandrovo, we will see that in Gorno Alexandrovo the number of individuals who possess a horse carriage is 5 times bigger than this in Sotirya. Gorno Alexandrovo also has the biggest percentage of car owners - 10% -, which is higher than this in Nikola Kochev neighborhood in Sliven.

The village is entirely electrified. 30% of our respondents have running water in their homes. Every tenth has a boiler – the same proportion as in Nikola Kochev neighborhood in Sliven. Only 2% of the interviewed have a toilet in the house. One of the respondents insisted that there was sewerage in his house, meaning the outgoing tubes installed there to take the outgoing waters to the river. Most of the Roma houses have outside toilets – septic holes surrounded by board fences. 12% have bathroom inside the house.

Part of the streets in the whole village are not covered with asphalt.

1/3 of the Roma households in Gorno Alexandrovo have conventional washing machines. None of our respondents has an automatic washing machine. More than 40% of the Roma houses have a refrigerator. Half of the households have black-and-white television. 20% of the interviewed have color TVs – this is the highest percentage compared to all the sites included in the study. The above 20% also have a video and a cassette player. Only in Sliven - in Nikola Kochev neighborhood there are more people with telephone lines. In Gorno Alexandrovo only 5% of the respondents have telephone line.

### **C. Employment and social services**

After the closedown of cooperative farms, the majority of rural Roma lost their permanent jobs. In 1995 a new cooperative was founded in Gorno Alexandrovo, which hired many Roma workers. They gathered the crops of 2000 decares of vineyards, 7000 decares of forage plants, 610 decares of peach trees and 100 decares of apple trees, all property of the village cooperative. In January 2000, however, the cooperative board decided to close it down as ineffective and now all plots of arable land will be returned to their former owners, who are Bulgarians. At the present moment, most of the Roma are engaged in seasonal activities in the village or in the villages near the town of Yambol. In the rest of the time many of them try to gain incomes through “suitcase trade”. Part of the men are engaged in gathering olives in Greece. Several men had worked in Israel for about a year. There are several persons who still work in the soda factories in the nearby villages of Trapolkovo and Dragodanovo. However, more than 20 Roma (predominantly young men and women) are registered as unemployed.

44% of the Roma in the village declared that they are unemployed. Although this percentage is twice as higher as the average rates of unemployment in the country, the proportion of unemployed Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo is considerably lower, compared to this of rural Roma as a whole. Many of them render small plots of arable land from the municipality and cultivate green crops for their domestic animal. In their own yards they grow vegetables, part of which they can for the winter. Most of the local Roma keep fowl, goats or cows.

Almost 20% of the rest are pensioner or are on maternity leave. 15% work full time. 12% work in state institutions. None of the Roma in the village runs private business. 7% work in cooperative farms - the highest percentage again.

Unemployment among husbands/wives is more or less the same. 30% of them are unemployed, 39% work full or part time. 23% have never worked - these are the young Roma in the village. Half of the unemployed was dismissed in the last 4 years. A quarter was dismissed in the last 5-10 years. Every year from 15 to 20 Roma from the village work on the Temporary Employment Program for 5 months at the minimum salary.

The reason for the mass dismissals in the last 5 years (the highest than anywhere else in the last 5-10 years) is the fact the majority of local Roma worked in the state agricultural cooperatives and not in the industrial factories in Sliven. Although the cooperatives were closed almost at the same time as factories, immediately afterwards private or municipal cooperatives were opened. The financial crisis in the country in the last 5 years badly affected the new cooperatives and did not allow them to open new jobs; on the contrary, it imposed new cuts in their working staff.

33% of the unemployed are not officially registered at the labor offices. This is mainly because they do not see any sense in spending money on bus tickets to Sliven every month, while monthly social aid for unemployed in the villages is not paid, anyway.

#### **D. Health care**

The local health center is situated on the second floor of the municipal building in the village. There is one doctor's assistant in the health center. In cases of a serious disease she directs sick people to the doctor in the nearby village of Blatetz. There is also a dentist there and a midwife in the health center. Serious medical tests and services are done in the polyclinic N3 in Sliven.

81% of the interviewed declared that there is a chronically sick member in their household. 15% have a certified handicapped member in the family. 95% of the interviewed have vaccinated all their children. Only 5% have vaccinated only some of their children or none of them. 17% of the Roma households have lost a child. One of those families has lost two children.

There is also an observable tendency towards self-treatment in more simple cases of disease.

#### **E. Interethnic relations**

Both Roma and Bulgarians claim that there are no serious conflicts on ethnic basis in the village, but the representatives of both communities had noticed certain aggravation in their relations in the last few years. Nobody speaks openly about this, but our hypothesis is that this is connected with the changed social status of the two groups - the Bulgarians became land-owners, and the Roma have no land and no right to become members but just to be hired in the local cooperative. Roma accept this change as unfair.

The Bulgarians are proud to mention that "their" Roma are diligent and nice, and have nothing to do with the thievish Roma from Sotirya and Topolchane.

### **The village of Sotirya**

#### **A. Family relations**

The Roma community in Sotirya is among the poorest in the country. In the same time it is among the communities with the earliest marital age and the highest rates of marriages without a legal registration, unstable families and very high birth rate and infant mortality.

The group is completely endogamous. Roma marry only within their own group in the village, in Nadezhda neighborhood in Sliven and sometimes in the villages of Topolchane, Samuilovo and the region of Yambol. There are frequent cases when women, who lived with several "husbands" without a legal marriage, have several children with different fathers.

In Sotirya the research team often witnessed cases of domestic violence and heard similar stories from our respondents. Men openly declare that women are lower creatures, bearer of evil spirits, who have to be punished. The widely spread alcoholism is yet another reason for the frequent cases of abuse against women.

Roma in Sotirya marry at a very early age. Men here get married at the average age of 15, and the girls - of 14. It could be noticed that marriage patterns here are closer to those of Roma from the Nadezhda ghetto in Sliven. Almost 90% of the people are married. Only 6% have never married. The percentage of divorces is higher than the average for the country - more than 8%. Every tenth person has a second or third marriage.

The traditional model of families with many children is also preserved among the local Roma community. In 1998 the number of newly born babies in the village was 45; only one of them was Bulgarian. According to data from the mayor's office one of the local Roma families has 16 children, another 3 have 15 children each, there are 2 families with 14 children each, 3 - with 13 children and 12 - with 12 children each. Only 1% of our respondents answered that they have never had children - these are usually the youngest respondents! The average number of children in Roma families in Sotirya is 4.6. 1.6% of the Roma have 15 children, 46% - have 5 and more children.

In the same time, according to 69% of the interviewed the ideal family should have from 1 to 2 children. This opinion is most widely spread among the young women. Men laugh at them and say: *"Children are never too many, only the money is not enough!"* They do not allow their wives to use contraceptives and a lot of young women shared with us that they give birth to all their children because they cannot afford to make abortions. There is a widely spread belief among Roma that mothers cannot get pregnant while breastfeeding the baby, which is very often refuted by their own practice. Less than 6% of our respondents want to have between 5 and 7 children.

There are no serious migration tendencies among Roma in Sotirya. Almost 1/3 of the interviewed do not want to go to another country at all. 98% of them never went abroad. None of the interviewed went on an excursion abroad. Only 4% of the people from Sotirya travel to other places in the country every day or at least once a week. These are people working in Sliven or the villages around Yambol. Every fifth does this much more rarely. The rest stated that they traveled only in cases of emergency. At the same time 23% of the respondents want to leave the village or the neighborhood, but do not have the necessary money.

## **B. Education**

There is a primary school and a kindergarten in the village. They are situated in one and the same old building, with toilets in the yard. Otherwise, the school is well kept – mainly by the teachers and by workers on the Temporary Employment Program. In the beginning of the year 2000 the kindergarten received a big grant from a Mormon church which included an automatic washing machine, a cooking stove, a colour television set, a video-player, toys, blankets and teaching materials.

The total of 86 pupils goes to the primary school in the village. Only 3 of them are Bulgarian children. According to the information from the school head master at least 40-50 of the local children do attend the regular school classes. In his opinion this number will grow in the next school year, because none of the previous sponsors provided grants for the free of charge snacks for the pupils any more. The municipality covers the transport costs to the town for those pupils', who want to continue their education after 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Up until now 39 children - all of them Bulgarian - have used this opportunity. Only 12 Roma children continued their elementary education at the Boarding School in the village of Dragodanovo. All the interviewed parents asserted that the lack of money was the basic reason why they did not send their children to school. In some of the cases the respondents also added that their children have been chronically sick.

In the last years Bulgarians from the village started to send their children to school in Sliven, because the local one is not considered very good as regards to the quality of education. The poverty affected the education of Bulgarian children as well. In the words of the local mayor, nowadays hardly half of the local Bulgarian and Turkish children graduate from secondary schools, while before 1990 there were more than 75% of young people with secondary education in the two communities.

The majority of Roma children in Sotirya do not speak Bulgarian, which is the basic reason for their educational problems. All of the respondents speak Romany at home. Most of the interviewed women had a very poor knowledge of Bulgarian and could hardly understand our questions. All the teachers in the village school are Bulgarians who do not speak Romany.

Roma in the village of Sotirya have an extremely low level of education. More than half of our respondents were illiterate. 32% have primary education that in the most of the cases leaves them functionally illiterate. Only 15% have elementary education and only 1% of them have graduated from secondary schools. None of the interviewed has graduated from vocational school or university. Roma in Sotirya have the worst educational background among all the studied groups. The same refers to their wives/husbands. None of the latter has higher education or vocational school diploma. More than half of them are illiterate. Less than 2% have graduated from high school. Only 25% have some professional qualification, but only 19% have the necessary grade to be compatible at the labor market. 20% of the interviewed declared that they went to a boarding school - this kind of school is very popular among Roma in Sotirya. Slightly more than 20% local Roma families declared that they send their children to a boarding school. Before this institutions used to provide a good environment and relatively good education, but recently the situation has changed for worse. Therefore, more and more rarely the parents send their children to such institutions.

Consequently, here we have the worst educational level for our respondents' children: 40% of the total of 81.6% respondents with children at school age declared that they do not send their children to school. The children of 6% of the respondents attend school irregularly. It has to be mentioned that local Roma have their own idea of "school age", which is quite different from the generally accepted one. If parents have decided that their child is sickly and delicate, they might send him/her to school after the age of 10 years in stead of 6 or 7 years. The first menstruation is usually considered a sign that the girl should leave school. The puberty age puts an end to boys' education too. This is why our respondents with children between the ages of 13 and 16 years usually declared that they did not have children at school age. Only 9% of the interviewed send their children to kindergarten.

### **C. Residential conditions**

When a person gets off the bus in the village there is only one perspective in front of him/her - straight up. There is no other dimension. The village is situated on top of a very pleasant hill at first sight. The houses are nice. The first row of houses look exactly those in the typical Bulgarian villages (later the research team discovered that these are houses of Bulgarians who remained in the village). The road is covered with straw, it smells like a real village. The Roma neighborhood is situated up the hill.

The houses in the neighborhood are as poor as those in Nadezhda ghetto. The only difference is that the houses here are situated on a larger territory. This does not mean that their inhabitants have living space, but just there is more air between the houses. The outermost buildings are extremely small, "*not completely built yet*", some of the walls are missing and the level of hygiene is very low. These houses are overpopulated. The research team witnessed the following picture there: Three small naked kids were playing with a pot full of dirty water dirty water. Three years old girl (at least she look like 3 years old) next to them was washing a sheet in a slightly bigger pot. The mother, very bored, was going through a pile of old stuff, probably brought by her husband or parents. In a short time, she told us to leave because she had work to do. Nothing could move the heat and haze that have "grabbed" the anyway frowned and bored village.

The average family in Sotirya consists of 6.4 members, most often – parents with their unmarried children and sometimes daughters, left by their husbands. Roma in Sotirya have 3.95 sq. m. of floor area per individual – which is the smallest figure, compared to the rest of sites in this study. Their homes have 25.3 sq. m. of floor area on the average. 34% of the local Roma inhabit shacks or one-room houses; made of sun-dried bricks or various materials at hand, with floor area of less than 10 sq. m. Another 30% have houses with 10-20 sq. m. of floor area. 20% of our respondents have two-room houses with 30-40 sq. m. of floor area. Hardly 5% live in houses of 40-60 sq. m. and another 11% have houses of 60-100 sq. m. More than 23% of the interviewed live not in their own home, but in those of their parents, other relatives or friends.

Only 3% of the inhabitants of this village possess land or some private farm, usually very small in size. Only 6% have a horse carriage. None of the above data fits in the standards for rural population.

Under 2% of the respondents have running cold water in their homes. It should be pointed out that in Sotirya as it was in Nadezhda neighborhood the interviewed insisted that they possessed particular things (sewerage, toilets, various electric appliances, etc.) even if it they were in the house. None of the interviewed have hot water in their houses! Under 5% of them have a bathroom. None of the respondents have a toilet in the house and only them of them has an outside "toilet", compared to Nadezhda ghetto where more than 30% on our respondents have toilets in the house. There was no central heating in any of the site included in the study.

According to the village mayor the local Roma neighborhood is not electrified. Roma who live close to the Bulgarian houses, use electricity illegally, by connecting to the electric wires on the street. In 1994 improperly connected wires caused the death of two children from the Roma neighborhood. After about 10 years at least the first row of Roma houses was electrified. Later the electricity was cut due to unpaid bills.

Most of the Roma families do not have any electric appliances in their houses. Only 6% of the respondents have a refrigerator. The same percentage of people have a conventional washing machine. None of the interviewed has a automatic washing machine. In comparison with other villages, here we found also the lowest number of owners of TV sets (even black-and-white) – one in 7 of the interviewed. A bit more are the people who have tape-recorder. Only one Roma family has telephone line.

#### **D. Employment and social services**

More than 92% of the interviewed Roma in Sotirya have no job at all. Only 3% work full time or part time. The rest are either, pensioners or women in maternity leave. The only person, who stated that had his own business, was the priest who runs a small cafe. There is one more “businessman” in the village - an animal trader – who was taken to prison several years ago.

4/5 of the respondents’ spouses are also unemployed. Only 3% of them are pensioners. Even less are those who work part time - mainly within the Temporal Employment Program or in the canning factory in Sliven. 10% of the respondents’ children under the age of 18 years work together with their parents – they collect scrap or look for seasonal jobs in the villages around Yambol. Probably this is part of the reasons why many local Roma children do not attend school - the strained financial situation of the family, which makes it very important if at least some of its members earn their living. There are no other working people in the neighborhood.

Sotirya is the village with the highest and the most continuous unemployment. None of the local unemployed has been dismissed for less than 4 years. 29% of the respondents have never worked. About 60% dropped out from the labor market in the last 5-10 years.

Slightly more than half of the interviewed basically rely on maternity benefits and children’s allowances. None of them expect to gather income from private farming or work on lease.

Almost 28% of the interviewed Roma gather their income by purchasing scrap, herbs and mushrooms. Only 14% rely mainly on pension, salary or social aid. Every ninth of the respondents tries to provide for their family through occasional jobs.

More than 78% have applied for social assistance. Only 12% of them were granted monthly social aid.

81% of the interviewed do not have reliable information about how and what kind of help they could receive from the Red Cross. Every 11<sup>th</sup> has applied for aid at the Red Cross. More than 83% of those respondents were not granted any.

In 1994 local Roma were given the opportunity to take on lease 700 sq. m. of vineyards per individual. Many of them sold their right to Bulgarians for some small payment, but others did not even care for it. If nobody takes care of the vineyards for one more year they would be wasted forever. Therefore, local Bulgarians decided not to offer them to Roma anymore, which was interpreted as an expression of racism.

One of the basic sources of income of Roma in Sotirya is the rubbish dump in the outskirts of Sliven, which is very close to the village. The other one is theft. People steal everywhere and everything, from the 270 villas around the village to the animals and the vegetables of their neighbors. As a result, the relations between Roma and Bulgarians became extremely hostile and those who want to earn an honest living usually manage to find seasonal work only in some very distant places.

#### **M.T. – Chief of the Labor office:**

*“You could see the extreme poverty of Roma in Nadezhda neighborhood and in the villages. Those from Nadezhda neighborhood at least receive their social aid, while Roma in villages get only*



*maternity benefits and children's allowances. Most of them make their living at the rubbish dump in Sotirya. Others live on begging or stealing. Some of the Roma used to gather lime blossoms and herbs, but in the last few years they rooted out the herbs and cut off the branches of the lime-trees, so now they are not a reliable source of income anymore. Roma do not care about consequences - for example, they steal into cherry orchards at night, cut off the trees and take them home, where they pick the cherries and then use the branches as firewood. On the next year there are no orchards and nowhere to steal from."*

#### **E. Health care**

There is no doctor in Sotirya and medical services are provided by a doctor's assistant, who is an alcoholic. In 1998 the municipality cut the job of a midwife, which immediately led to an increase in the infant mortality in the village. Most of the Roma women do not go to the town hospital and give birth at home without medical help. This not only creates risks for the life of both the baby and its mother, but also leaves the baby without vaccinations.

Half of the interviewed define their health status as bad or extremely bad. 63% stated that they had a chronically sick member in the family. The main reason for the low health status of Roma is the high level of unemployment, which brings all the consequences of poverty - malnutrition and especially protein insufficiency; chronic diseases, etc. The diseases characteristic of Roma in Sotirya are renal disorders, heart diseases, various kinds of allergy - asthma, bronchitis, as well as various malformations with the prematurely born babies. Those babies are often abandoned in orphanages without any signature certifying parents' will that the child is left for adoption... There are cases of tuberculosis among Roma children.

Many health problems of Roma arise from their early marriages and the mass unemployment and poverty. Their general health knowledge is at very low level. The infant mortality rate is very high in their community. Roma often suffer from chronic hepatitis due to chronic malnutrition, domestic alcoholism, tobacco smoking since very early age and the acetone glue they use to inhale.

There are certified handicapped people only in 8% of the households. But this number does not show the real number of handicapped in the community. The information is wrong not because the people want to hide the real number, but due to the lack of necessary certificate.

For other reasons we receive distorted information for the number of the vaccinated children. Many Roma children in Sotirya are not vaccinated. In 1992 there was an outbreak of diphtheria. In 1994 the first cases of the outbreak of poliomyelitis that stuck down 68 children in the whole municipality (all of them Roma) started again there. 3 of the children in the first house we entered suffered from whooping cough. Due to the risk of sanctions, parents conceal the fact that their children are not vaccinated. Only every eighth person admitted that they had not vaccinated their children. 5% of the respondents have vaccinated just some of their children. 80% claim that they have vaccinated all their children.

Infant mortality in Sotirya is very high. Every fifth of the respondent had lost a child. More than 8% of these people have lost five children. 17% have lost at least two children, and the rest - one child. 85% of the Roma in Sotirya have not heard about the health reform, but were not very worried when

they heard this information from research team. Half of them anyway visit a doctor only in case of emergency.

According to the doctors in the Regional hospital in Sliven, *“There is no change in the quality of health services, but the health status of people sharply deteriorated due to the increasing poverty and the continual stress to which we are subjected. Sometimes we have problems with children's vaccination, especially with Roma. They do not have a permanent address and often travel to provide living for their families, so their children cannot be found for vaccination at home. They rarely go to school, either. Years ago we used to have a very good system and managed to cover all children in the regular vaccinations, but now it is not working. This led to several dangerous epidemic outbreaks in the municipality - one of diphtheria in the beginning of the 90s and one of poliomyelitis sometime later. They both started from Sotirya village. One of my patients there - Velichka - was the first who got sick. She was not vaccinated...I have worked in Sotirya for a long time, but it was different before. Villages are not very far from the towns and the intercity transport is comparatively good. In normal conditions there should not be any problems. However, due to their incredible poverty Roma can't even afford the tiny transportation costs in order to visit a doctor.”*

The research team asked the doctors what would be the impact of changes in the sphere of health upon the access of poor people to health services. Here is one of the typical answers:

**Dr. P. T.:**

*“Considering the fact that a significant number of unemployed is not registered at the labor offices, we can make the conclusion that part of the poorest people will remain without a health insurance. After the end of the year they won't be able to afford any kind of treatment, apart from emergency medical assistance. These people usually have many children, most of them sick. Probably, in the beginning some colleagues will continue to treat them for free, just because they always did so. Actually, at present many of us don't ask patients for money, especially in cases of old people and children; we are not used to. However, the fact that patients rely on doctors' humanity is quite pessimistic, having in mind the low salaries of medical staff in the country.”*

A significant part of the Roma in Sotirya more and more often drop out from the sphere of health services. There is doctor in the village, but only a doctor's assistant who, according to what peasants said, *“is constantly drunk”*. They could get qualified medical help only in Sliven. Several women gave birth without doctor's or midwife's assistance. 75% have never been to medical check-ups. More than half treat themselves at home with herbs, tea and some simple medicines - even this type of treatment is not very common due to the lack of money. 95% of the interviewed claimed that they almost never could buy medicines due to the lack of money.

Maybe all this is the reason for the big number of people who had to enter a hospital - 74% of the interviewed. 6% of them, however, could not afford it! Half of those who spent some times in a hospital had to pay for medicines and other medical consumables. 20% provided also their food at hospital alone. Roma ascribe this to the strong racism of the Bulgarians, although the above requirements apply for Bulgarians too. 22% of the respondents asserted that they were refused medical help. Many of them complained that they only wasted their time in the hospital or polyclinic, they were not paid attention for hours and were refused a free of charge check-up when they had tried to visit another doctor.

## **F. Interethnic relations**

Interethnic relations between Bulgarians and Roma in the village of Sotirya are extremely sharpened. This is due to the cultural differences, different moral values and constant disagreements between the two ethnic groups. Bulgarians go to the mayor's office to complain against Roma and their attitude towards life, while Roma have just left his office after they complained against the racism of Bulgarians. If the mayor tries to solve the conflict he would be if not lynched then at least accused in racism. If he does not undertake something, he would be accused of being irresponsible and indifferent to his fellow villagers (by the Bulgarians) or of being a racist (by the Roma).

A policeman comes twice a week for two hours and does not do anything else except to register the new incidents (mainly thefts of food or building materials). Despite the organized by the Bulgarians group for fight against the "*thievish tribe*" – Roma - the weekly list of thefts looks more or less like this: 1 calf, 2 milk cows, 1 donkey, 1 pig, hens, aluminum wire - cable - 50 meters, copper wire - 120 meters. The thefts are usually not uncovered.

There are 290 attacked villas in the region - no untouched villa. Even the roof tiles are stolen from some of them. There is municipal orchard in the village that belonged to the former state cooperative. Recently this cherry orchard was completely robbed by the Roma. They used to go inside, cut the cherry trees in order not to be caught and pick the cherries in peace at home. Then they were selling the cherries, and used the branches as firewood in the winter. This was the most widely discussed accident in the village at the time we were there.

At the same time Bulgarians are additionally worried due to problems with the restitution of land. Their land was divided into villa plots. At the time when Roma received 700 sq. m. of vineyards on lease, this added more tension to the situation. Roma in turn, reject, as strongly as possible, an outside intervention trying to change their traditional way of living. At the same time they interpret both that they were given the land and then deprived of it (after they had almost spoiled it) as an expression of pure racism.

46 Roma families applied for timber at the mayor's office. But the foresters did not allow additional cutting of wood for ecological reasons and local Roma immediately accused the mayor of being a racist. They also claim that social aid is allocated on the ethnic principle.

There is neither water-supply, nor electricity in the local Roma neighborhood. In order to install electricity the electric company requires underground cable network, which is impossibly expensive for the municipality. Already in 1993-1994 the wooden pillars, put for installation of electric wires, were cut and stolen for heating. Nevertheless, now Roma think that there is ethnic discrimination against them and that it is the only reason why there is no electricity in their neighborhood. They claim that if the same thing had happened in a Bulgarian neighborhood, the electric company would not have the same requirements.

Most of the Roma homes in Sotirya are illegally built. When restitution of land and all the details concerning it are finally settled, it is very likely that these 'houses' might be destroyed. This is another reason for Roma to be worried and to feel and claim that they are subjected to racism.

Due to financial problems the municipality has not paid children's and maternity benefits for five months (these are the only kinds of social aid, received by Roma in villages). Unfortunately, Roma are convinced that this is also due to the discriminative attitude against them.

Bulgarians in Sotirya, in their turn, are almost enraged. They speak about revenge and are ready to take the law in their own hands. They blame Roma for everything and insists that the security measures should be more strict. Local Bulgarians consider Roma parasites, who live at their expenses and simply steal from them, while they (Bulgarians) are working for their social aid.

#### 4. Detailed report from in-depth interviews

In the summer of 1999 the research team consisted of 10 students from the Sofia University majoring in ethnology, philosophy and psychology, a student from the Shoumen University - Roma from the Nikola Kochev district - and the scientific adviser of the team - Dr. Ilona Tomova. During the study the research team gathered a large amount of information both from experts - interviewed mainly by the scientific adviser Ilona Tomova - and from residents of the two Roma neighborhoods in Sliven and of the villages of Topolchane, Sotirya and Gorno Alexandrovo - interviewed mostly by the students.

The interviews provided information about the respondents' families and family relations; about their own biography; about the level of education of the respondents and their family members; about their employment, health status, access to health services and social insurance; the respondents view about the changes in the way of life in their neighborhoods as well as their comments about those changes. In addition to this general information gathered by all Roma respondents the study included the life stories of 10 individuals from various Roma sub-groups in the above two urban neighborhoods

The data from the in-depth interviews with Roma showed that poverty has always accompanied their life even in the socialist period, when the state provided jobs and obligatory free of charge education; when the it often covered the expenses for clothing, food and accommodation of pupils at the school boarding houses; when all citizens had access to free of charge health services and a significant part of Roma were granted free of charge medicines.

Most of the "naked" Roma were involved in the labor process in Bulgaria comparatively later and their participation in the economic life of the country has always been rather marginal. The results from our interviews with representatives of this sub-group showed that they remember employment in the socialist period basically with frequent absence from work, alcoholic nights and quarrels with party commissars, who were responsible for the labor discipline. Nevertheless, their stories about the near past are full of nostalgia for the social rule. They remember about excursions and festivals organized in the leisure time by the state enterprises, as well as about pioneer children's camps and various concerts in which they participated. The state factories in which they worked organized both their daily life and their entertainment and rest. The dropping out of Roma from the labor market limited not only their income but also all their social relations and disturbed the whole organization of their life. This observation is confirmed by the conclusions of W. Wilson about the extreme importance of the mass unemployment as one of the basic characteristics of the underclass formation.

The representatives of the various Roma sub-groups in Bulgaria have a different social status; therefore the crisis and unemployment intensity and depth vary in the different sub-groups. This is confirmed by the excerpts from life stories of Roma from different sub-groups at a comparatively equal age quoted below:

Dobrinka Alexandrova, Sliven, Nikola Kochev district, 68 years old.

*"I was born in 1938 in Sliven in a family with 6 children - 2 boys and 4 girls. I spent my childhood in the neighborhood. My parents were textile workers. My father was a spinner and mother - a seamstress. They worked in the factory of Georgy Kalov - one of wealthy people in the town.*

*Although they worked for 12 hours a day my parents never had enough money for clothes and shoes. All of a went barefoot in the summer and wore pattens in the winter. We were very poor but our parents managed to bring us up.*

*My brothers, sisters and I went to Bratya Miladinovi School. My mother was illiterate but she insisted that we should receive a good schooling. My father could read and write. There were pupils from all ethnic groups in our school and we were never separated. In 1940 the Germans army came with its tanks. Then a curfew was imposed on the whole town and the workers went on their nights shifts with their hands up waving permits and certificates from the factory owners to prove that they were at work.*

*Once a group of German soldiers came to our school and asked to take a picture with the Bulgarian pupils. They put us and the Jewish children aside, but I started crying and the teacher let me take a picture together with Bulgarian classmates. In this period the Jewish children had to leave the school but Gypsy pupils could stay.*

*My father got tuberculosis from the permanent starvation and died in 1947. Then I myself chose to go to an orphanage, where I could receive my secondary education. I had gone to the orphanage for two years when they decided to move it to Plovdiv and my mother did not let me go there.*

*Then there was a Bulgarian boy who asked me to marry him, but my mother told him that we were Gypsies and that I could not become his wife. Later I started a training course for nursery teachers. Right after I passed it I was appointed first in the kindergarten in the village of Golyamo Shivachevo, then in the village of Malko Chochoven, then in Mechkarovo and finally in Sliven. I taught both the children and their parents - from the groups of musicians and "naked" Gypsies - how to read and write. The literacy courses for adults were held in an old shopping booth in Nadezhda district. Thus I taught 50 individuals how to read and write. Those were mainly young men and women over the age of 14 years, married and completely illiterate. I was paid to teach them.*

*In the past every family used to send its children to work after they became 12-13 years old. So both the bigger and the smaller children went to work, but nevertheless we were always starving. It was the same in my family - all my brothers and sisters, together with my parents were textile workers. Only I never stopped school in order to go to work.*

*Only two Roma families from the Nadezhda district worked in the textile factories. The rest of them were street cleaners, musicians or firewood suppliers. In the summer lords of the harvest came to town to hire Gypsies as seasonal workers in the villages. The Turks were better-off. Some of them were craftsmen - ironmongers, goldsmiths, traders, rogozhari, etc. They were more neat and tidy. Their children studied at the Turkish school, which was later closed down. The others lived in a horrible poverty.*

*I married after all my brothers and sisters at the age of 23 years. But my family was more educated, open-minded and cleanly. It was after my marriage when I really entered a Gypsy house. My husband had 3 sisters and a brother. He had started working at the age of 14 years. His father had been arrested many times for communist activities. He was tortured by the police and sent to a concentration camp. During his absence from home two of the smaller children died from starvation. The rest of them had to work. That is why my husband could not even graduate 4<sup>th</sup> class. After 1944*

*he passed a short educational course and then joined the navy, where he served for 4 years. This was part of the special policy towards minorities - everybody was given the chance to study if they wanted. After the navy service he studied in textile vocational school and became a very good technician.*

*I never liked my mother-in-law, the house was very small and poor, and she always interfered with our life. My husband and I left for the town of Smolyan together with our children - he was appointed as a chief of a department in a tailoring factory there and started working as a seamstress. We lived in Smolyan for 4 years and gathered money, with which we built this house when we got back here. My son graduated high military school and became a major. He has a nice apartment. His wife is a teacher. My grandson is a university student and my granddaughter studies in a high school. My daughter has a pedagogical education but they always dismiss her when there are cuts in the school staff and she does not have a permanent job. In the last 10 years she changed 4 jobs. There was no such discrimination before; we were all equal..."*

*Rabie Alieva Mehmedova, Sliven, Nadezhda district, a Turkish Gypsy, 59 years old:*

*"My father Ali Mehmedov Karaliev is from Sliven. He was a carter, then worked in the public services and later in a textile factory. My mother was a housewife and she never worked. We were 5 sisters - the oldest one Ayshe, then myself, then Zeinep, Seher and Dudu. Ayshe was born in 1938. She graduated from the Turkish school and after September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944 she studied pedagogy in a high school in Kardzhali and became a teacher. She always worked in village schools. Later she married a Bulgarian and now they live in their own house in the village of Samuilovo. They have one child.*

*Zienep was born in 1943. She stopped school after 2<sup>nd</sup> class because our parents could not provide for the education of all of us. She married a boy from the Kardzhali region, who drank a lot and harassed her, so she finally divorced him and came back here. Zeinep brought up her two children alone. She worked in the textile factory.*

*Seher was born in 1946. She graduated only 4<sup>th</sup> class and stopped going to school because we were poor, although she wanted to continue her education. She also studied in the Turkish school. At the age of 16 Seher started working in the canning factory. She has never contracted a civic marriage. Men always cheated her. One of them was a drunkard, the other one - a hooligan. Both of them lived with her for while and then left her. Now she lives with us in Nadezhda and doesn't want to marry anymore.*

*...*

*Dudu was born in 1950. She never went to school. She married at the age of 15 for a local guy and they worked together in the slaughterhouse. Now they are both unemployed*

*I graduated 7<sup>th</sup> class at the Turkish school but fell sick with infantile paralysis and had to leave school. I was accepted in the school of agriculture in Stara Zagora but the doctors said that I shouldn't strain myself, so my mother didn't let me go to school. At the age of 15 I started working at the canning factory. The salary there was very low and I left the factory after a year. Then I became a dishwasher in the Rousalka restaurant and after a training course I qualified as an assistant cook. My salary as an assistant cook was also very poor but I had free of charge meals and could take the remaining food at home. I have worked in the restaurant for 5-6 years after I married.*

*I hadn't even seen my husband before the marriage - my parents chose him for me. He was from the town of Yambol - a young man who had never gone to school. We moved to live in his house. Our son was born in Yambol. My husband drank too much and two years after our marriage my husband died from a heart attack. Right after that I came back to my mother's place in Sliven. Then I started working in the restaurant again and she was looked after my child. After that I worked as a hospital attendant in the Regional Hospital for 8 years. Then I was a cook in school canteens for several years - this job at least provided free of charge food. We have always been poor. Finally I worked in the canteen of the Municipal People's Council for 3 months in 1989 and after my dismissal I've been unemployed up until now. I have 18 years length of labor, which is not enough for me to get a pension.*

*My son studied in the Bratya Miladinovi School until 10<sup>th</sup> grade and has a professional qualification as a turner. He was a frontier guard in Elhovo for 3 years. After his dismissal he got married and started working at the Georgy Dimitrov (now renamed Slitex) textile factory. There were many cuts in the working staff but he is still there as a laborer. My son lives in the Nadezhda district. His has two children, who are now 4<sup>th</sup> class pupils at the Bratya Miladinovi School."*

L. S. - from the group of the "naked" Roma living in the Nadezhda district. Our respondent identified himself as *darakchiya* (carder).

*"My father was born in the village of Kamen. He was left an orphan and had to make his living alone at a very early age. Thus, 80 years ago he came in Sliven in his search for a job. My grandfather was an agricultural laborer in Bulgarian farms and my grandmother was a beggar. They were very poor.*

*In his childhood my father lived in the town but in the summer he was hired by Bulgarian farmers in the villages as a seasonal worker - like his father. In Sliven he married a girl from Nadezhda and moved in her house. In the socialist times he started working in a textile factory as wool washer. Several years before pension he had a labor accident and was granted a disablement pension. My father had 7 children but only three of them are alive now - two brothers and one sister.*

*All of us worked in the same textile factory as my father. We all got married, only one of my sisters died before marriage. My two older brothers graduated 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class, I and my sisters studied until 4<sup>th</sup> class. All of us have many children. I married very young and at the age of 18 when I was recruited in the army I already had two children. I was in the labor corps for two years and my wife, who worked in the hosiery factory, received children's allowances from there. After my discharge from the army we had another 4 children. Now my wife gets pension as a mother of many children. My two sisters have 8-9 children each.*

*My oldest son married in the town of Bourgas. He is a construction worker and his wife is cleaner. He pays us visits every month and brings us clothes and money. Another of my sons and one of my daughters married here in the neighborhood and moved to their spouses'. But then my daughter's husband died and she came back home with her three children. Her oldest son, Assen, is 17. He is married and has a child. They live in my house too. My third son retired from the army half a year ago. He lives here too and is unemployed. My two youngest children - a boy and a girl - are twins. The boy is still in the army and the girl remained handicapped after she had infantile paralysis. She has had an endless series of operations for three years now. Apart from my oldest son all my*



*children and grandchildren are unemployed. None of my grandchildren went to school. How can they go to school when we don't have money for living!*

*The situation now is even worse than in the time, when my father settled in Sliven. Now there are no factories again but there is no agricultural work either and the beggars crowded over the town... There are no sources of income. In addition, Gypsies became a permanent victim of hatred and contempt, which was not so before. Todor Zhivkov (the former General Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party and a Head of the State from 1954 to 1989 - I. T.) protected and loved us and did not allow anyone to fight and offend us. But see what happened now - this democracy and these Bulgarian Socialist Party and Union of the Democratic Forces ruined us. Everybody had a job before; there was only one alcoholic in the neighborhood, who they never managed to keep at work and who finally died without a single working day. It sometimes happened that I couldn't wake up after drinking too much at night. In such cases the political commissar would come at home at 10 o'clock in the morning to wake me up, because if somebody was absent from work for more than 3 days without a permission he/she was dismissed. But the commissar never let us miss the third day and always came to take us to work. This applied to everybody in the neighborhood. Those who refused to go to work after the political commissar called them, were dismissed; then they started to look for another job and were dismissed again; but one could also be interned ... In the past we kept blaming the political commissars, but it got worse now. Everybody wants to work but there are no vacant jobs..."*

Unemployment became the most serious of the Roma community. Its mass scale and long-termness, as well as its tendency to remain such for a long period of time and the related extreme impoverishment of Roma and their dependence on social assistance are the major characteristics of the underclass formation in many of the Roma ghettos.

Case 98:

A 23 years old woman with 8 children. Her ninth child died as a baby. Our respondent got married at the age of 13 years and she never went to school. Her three smaller children were naked, with swollen bellies and apathetic look. One of the boys, presented as 6 years old, did not seem to be older than 3 years. The family lives in a 1.5-m. high roofless shack, without a door and windows. They have only one bed, in which we saw a 10 years old child with a bleeding face. Both our respondent and her husband have been unemployed.

*"There's no work. We get monthly aids and children's allowances. The three older kids collect bread from the garbage bins and we sell it to the musicians to feed their pigs. We also take our clothes from the garbage. Sometimes the kids bring thrown bottles and paper... Social aids always come late. We keep waiting for months to take our money, but if we are late with one day for registration, they stop the aids for half a year. They always quarrel with us when we go to take the aids. They call policemen to beat us. They hit our legs, because we didn't keep our place on the line!"*

A 25 years old woman, married, with 1 child. She has been unemployed for 3 years and has elementary education. Her husband is involved in the Temporary Employment Program. The family basically lives on the financial support of her grandparents.

*“There is discrimination. When they see that you’re darker they immediately say: “There’re no vacant jobs!”. Bulgarians find jobs more easily – no wonder, since all bosses are Bulgarians!*

*Take the carpet factory – Subi Dimitrov – for example. The manager is Bulgarian from the village of Strupets. Several years ago they dismissed more than 200 workers – mainly Gypsies. They said there were no markets for our production. Before our carpets have been exported for the Soviet Union and the Arabic countries. After we were cut the manager employed 30 Bulgarians from his native village. Now they take them by bus from the village and we stay home without work!”*

A 26 years old man, ironmonger by profession. He is married and has one child. His wife is unemployed. Our respondent has been unemployed since 1999. He has elementary education.

*“In the last few years they started to segregate people. There were about 10 Gypsies in our shop in the machine-tool plant. We were the first to be dismissed when the cuts in the staff started. Now I hear that they started to dismiss Bulgarians too, but they started with us. There are no vacant jobs in the town. We’re only offered work in the public cleaning at a minimum salary. If one refuses such the job his social aid is stopped. They don’t send Bulgarians to clean the streets. Now there’re no jobs in the private companies to.*

*I look more like a Bulgarian, so it’s easier for me to find a job, but when employers see that I’m a Roma, I’m immediately dismissed.*

*Our last hope is to steal firewood from the forest and sell it. We cut the firewood and carry it on our backs down the hill. And the forest-guards shoot at us! But one can’t just sit and wait for allowances when the family is hungry!...”*

A 34 years old woman from Sotirya, married, with 4 children. Two of her children are also married. Her son serves in the army and her smaller daughter lives in the boarding house in Dragodanovo. Our respondent is illiterate.

*“My husband and I worked in the village cooperative. When it was closed things got bad. There’s no work for us here. In the summer my husband, my son and I go to the villages around Yambol to plant and gather onions, garlic, and pickling onions. We get 6 leva per day each. My daughter remains here to keep the house. I always try to save the money of the three of us and buy some flour, rice, beans or lentils. When I manage to gather some 10 kg of foodstuffs, my son or my husband take it here – for the winter. I try to spend less than 5-8 leva a day for the three of us. And the money just goes – for food, alcohol and cigarettes... If my husband finds the money he gets drunk and spends everything.*

*Everything I manage to save in the summer goes for food, so that we can survive in the winter. Even if he finds some job here my husband spends everything for drinks. I try to take him out of the village – to gather hips, lime blossoms, herbs or firewood, so that I can take the money when we sell them. He gets very bad when he’s drunk and always spoils for a fight.*

*In the winter we go to rubbish dump to gather tin caps, bottles – everything that can be sold. But there are so many of us – some 100 people every day – and all garbage bins are already rummaged by the paupers from Sliven. How much do you think we get? Some 1-2 leva for bread.”*

Case 537:

A 26 years old woman with 5 children. She got married at the age of 13 years. Our respondent is illiterate and she has never worked. Her husband is unemployed too. Their children do not go to school.

*“Nobody here hires us at work. We make our living from the rubbish dump and pick hips in the autumn. We don’t get monthly social aids. Last winter we have received 25 levs for 5 months. The children’s allowances haven’t been paid since April. There’s no work for us here, so we can’t receive mother’s allowances. Now people from Euro Roma (a political party) started coming here. They visit pregnant women, take their medical cards, take 50-70 levs per individual and promise they will pay them mother’s allowances for 2 years. We’ll see if this is true. The social worker, Margarita, is a very bad woman. She doesn’t give us aids and makes us work on the Temporary Employment Program for 5 months. They stop the children’s allowances and the winter aids to anyone who refuses. People have to go to Sliven for some 50 levs. This doesn’t cover even the transport costs! We go to the mayor - for aids, for water supply...He doesn’t do anything; only tells us to get away.”*

Case 538:

A 51 years old man with 15 children and 7 grandchildren. One of his sons was killed in a robbery. Our respondent married at the age of 12 years. Both he and his wife are illiterate. He has been unemployed for 10 years. Before this he worked as a shepherd in the agricultural cooperative. His wife has never worked.

*“If it was not the rubbish dump, we would have died. We purchase jar caps, paper, bottles. In the summer we gather lime blossom and hips. We even search for food at the rubbish dump like pigs. There is one Bulgarian with 200 pigs; we gather waste food together with him. The social worker doesn’t care about us. We haven’t seen her since the spring. It was since then that they haven’t paid children’s allowances. We get aids for heating – they gave us 15 levs three times and 25 levs once. Our kids never ate milk and meat. I owe 260 levs to the storekeeper – for bread. The Bulgarians give us tomatoes, peppers, but they’re poor too. We take clothes from the rubbish dump – we wash them and then wear them. Sometimes the Bulgarians give us worn clothes too. In the winter we steal firewood from the forest and the foresters chase and beat us.”*

The results from the interviews also indicated sharp deterioration in the educational status of the children with unemployed parents, which would limit their chances to find a job and would further reproduce the poverty and marginalization of the group. The in-depth interviews with “naked” Roma in the Nadezhda district and in the villages of Topolchane and Sotirya showed that poverty is not the only reason for children’s dropping out of school. The residents in those isolated and segregated neighborhoods have gradually formed mechanisms for protection against the forcible attempts for assimilation of the ethnic communities and against the total isolation and rejection of their group which mechanisms find expression in their opposition to the culture and values of the macrosociety. The above said is of a great importance for the better understanding of the failure of the educational reform among part of the Roma - mainly those living in segregated neighborhoods. The processes of underestimation of the school performance of young people from the big urban black ghettos in the United States have been studied also by Kenneth Clark in *The Black Ghetto*. He points out that the black ghettos’ residents react to the social exclusion from the macrosociety. by rejection of the

values and aspirations of this society. Since black young people cannot hope to achieve significant self-respect through the ways accessible to the more privileged youth from which they are deprived through the inadequate education they receive, through their discrimination at work and through an inappropriate social policy, they develop a cultural identity that opposes the ideals of the macrosociety. Segregation forms the structural context in which the opposition culture develops. Later Ogbu and Fordham study the impact of the opposition culture upon the educational achievements of black children. Their research shows how the clever, motivated, intelligent and studious ghetto children face the extremely strong pressure on the part of their peers directed against their motivation and willingness to achieve good academic success.

We have reasons to believe that Roma children in the completely segregated schools are subjected to a similar pressure. In any case, the conviction that *“School is for Bulgarians, it is not for us”* is widely spread among the middle-aged “naked” Roma in the segregated districts included in our study and is passed from one generation to another. Indirect evidence showing that school is not among their priority values is the growing number of children from segregated districts dropping out from the system of education even if they do not come from poor families. However, the majority of Roma parents point out poverty as the main reason for their children’s dropping out of school.

In Nadezhda ghetto 59% of the respondents declared that they have children at school age, but only 1/3 of them send their children to school regularly. Another 23% of the interviewed parents declared that their children do not go to school regularly. There are several reasons for this low school attendance. The usual explanation of the parents is: *“We have no money, no clothes and shoes, should we send them naked to school?” “They have no clothes, they could wear rags on the street, but not in school”; “I don’t have money for notebooks, for textbooks”*. Practically, when asked why their children do not go to school, all parents gave the above ready answers.

Here are typical cases:

Case 177:

A 29 years old woman with 6 children. Her seventh child died. Our respondent has a primary education, and her husband – a secondary education. She has never worked. Her husband is an unskilled laborer in a private company, which often stops working due to the lack of clients.

*“My older daughter is 14 years old, but she doesn’t go to school. She helps me at home to take care of the smaller kids (4 and 2 years old). The boys go to school. The 2 older ones finished 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. One of them is 12 and the other one – 11 years old. The third one is 10 and he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. They go when they can. When it’s very cold they don’t want to get up from the bed, ‘cause they’re freezing. We can’t pay for heating. It doesn’t make a big difference if they go or don’t go to school. There are no jobs for us.*

*The school isn’t good. Children don’t learn anything, which they could use afterwards. They keep these schools, so that the Bulgarians don’t lose their jobs. They sponge on us. Why does nobody care that the school director and the teachers steal pupils’ meals? How is it possible that there were meals up until the spring and then they have finished? They’ve stolen the money for breakfasts! They probably bribe the owner of the bakery to give them a receipt and then they share the money, while the kids stay hungry!”*

During the communist years a requirement for obligatory high school education was imposed. School head masters and teachers were entitled the full responsibility for the non-visiting school children. A practice was established for the teachers to go to the Roma neighborhoods every morning and to gather the children from their homes. They received additional 5% to their salary for doing this. If parents refused to send the child to school, there were different administrative punishments including forced labor. In the 60's there was a local Council's decision some Roma families to be interned to the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane from the Nadezhda ghetto as a punishment for their refusal to send their children to school and for involving them in criminal activities in the same time.

This background information explains the following answers given by our respondents to the question, why didn't they send their children to school: *"Nobody came to subscribe them."*, *"Nobody from the municipality came."*, *"We don't know which teacher we should send them to."*

Some of the respondents were worried about the security of their children: *"We are afraid that there are people who would steal our children and kill them"*; *"The children are afraid to pass through the neighborhood because the musicians beat them"*; *"They are sick, they are afraid that something could happen to them"*; *"The teacher doesn't know Romany and she kicked them out"*; *"The others beat them in the school because they don't have shoes"*; *"The kids might be knocked down by car"*; *"There are a lot of difficulties: they beat them, took their money on the road, the school is far away, there's no money, no living conditions, the traffic is heavy"*.

Case 102:

A 34 years old man. He has been unemployed for 5 months. His wife is unemployed too. Our respondent has 3 children at the ages of 12, 9 and 7 years. None of them went to school and he does not intend to send them to school in the future. Both respondent himself and his wife are illiterate.

*"Where should they go? There's no money. We're poor and that's why we don't go to school. The teacher never came here to list the kids for school. Who should I send them to?"*

Case 104:

A 47 years old man. He has been unemployed for 10 years. In the weekend he goes to the graveyard where people hire him to water the flowers and keep the graves. One of his sons is deaf and one of his daughters suffers from a kidney disease. His wife works as a cleaner.

*"Our kids rarely go to school. They are afraid to go through the neighborhood. The musicians and the gradeshki Roma beat them. Their children beat ours in the school too, to take their money. My kids sold cherries and gathered some money, but the musicians fought with them and took all they had."*

Case 111:

A 28 years old woman. Mother of 3 children. Illiterate. She suffered from uterus cancer and had an operation. Our respondent has been unemployed for 8 years. Her husband is unemployed too. Her 2 sons – 11 and 8 years old – never went to school. Her 6 years old daughter does not go to kindergarten. One of her sons suffered from taenia and had an operation; the other one suffered from chronic hepatitis.

*“There’s no money. My bigger son works with us – people hire him to chop timber and to carry charcoal to their cellars. He helps us gathering waste paper and bottles (for purchasing scrap – I. T.). We don’t let the other kids go out. We are afraid, for there are people who steal the kids and cut them to pieces to sell their hearts.”*

Case 114:

A 45 years old woman. Both she and her husband are illiterate and unemployed. She has been unemployed for 10 years. Our respondent has 5 children and 8 grandchildren. None of her children (at the ages from 15 to 26 years) has gone to school.

*“They didn’t want to study and we didn’t make them to.”*

Case 140:

A 35 years old woman from the group of the “Turkish Roma”. Mother of 3 children. Both she and her husband have a primary education. Our respondent has been unemployed for 8 years. Her husband is unemployed too, however, he puts a lot of efforts to find a job – he is temporary hired as a sewerage worker and tried to purchase goods in Serbia, unsuccessfully due to the conflict in Kosovo.

*“My kids go to school. The bigger one finished 8<sup>th</sup> class. He’s 15 years old. But we’ll stop him from school because he has to help his father. Now we rely only on their grandparents’ pensions. My daughter is 13 and she graduated 6<sup>th</sup> class. My youngest kid is 7 years old. He’ll start school this year. They’re good pupils. The bigger ones sang in the school choir – they’re very good singers. We’re musicians. Once I used to sing in the school choir too.”*

There were cases when parents spoke openly about the unwillingness on the part of the children to visit school: *“The child didn’t want to study”, “Even if he had studied, he wouldn’t find a job”, “We are at work and the children do not go to school”.*

One of the basic educational problems of Roma children in Nadezhda is the fact that the majority of them do not speak Bulgarian fluently. In several cases the resource group needed an interpreter from Romany or Turkish in order to get some of the interviews with Roma women. Even the adults, especially the women, speak a very bad Bulgarian. They have an extremely poor vocabulary and pronounce many words in a wrong way.

Only 4% of the children under school age living in Nadezhda neighborhood attend kindergartens. Here we find again the lowest percentage of children attracted to kindergartens. And again the reasons are financial.

Case 568, Topolchane:

A 32 years old woman with 2 children. She had an operation from cancer of womb and now she cannot have other children. Our respondent married at the age of 13 years. Her husband is in prison for theft. She is illiterate and has been unemployed for 10 years. Her husband has an elementary education. At present her younger son suffers from brain tumor.

*“My older son is 9 years old. He didn’t go to school. His father was taken in prison, I’m unemployed and they don’t give us aids here. They haven’t paid us even the children’s allowances since April. I can’t afford sending him to school and even buying him clothes. He comes with me when I go begging. It is shameful, but what can I do... The kids have to eat something.”*

The in-depth interviews showed that “ghetto related behavior”, if we use W. Wilson’s terminology, is applicable in some respect to Roma living in segregated neighborhoods. More and more illiterate young people from those neighborhoods, where unemployment reaches 90% of the adult population, would grow up with the idea that labor is not necessarily a constructive part of their life. As a result of this more and more residents of the ghetto would rely on illegal sources of income which in its turn would continue to weaken their relation to the legitimate labor market. Many of our respondents from the group of the *gradeshki* Roma in Nadezhda district and those from the village of Sotirya declared that in the winter they make their living mainly by thefts. For example, one of our female respondents from Topolchane told us that her son was shot in his attempt to rob a summerhouse in the outskirts of Sliven. The boy was only 15 years old. Other respondents told us that they send their children to steal agricultural produce from Bulgarian farms at night because if they were caught the owners would only give them a slapping and would let them go but if the father were caught stealing, he would be sent to prison.

Another example of “ghetto related behavior” are the frequent cases of domestic violence in Roma ghettos. Domestic violence is observed among all ethnic communities and among all social groups on the Balkans but in the Roma ghettos it is an open and frequent practice. The young people in the ghettos often become witnesses of acts of violence in their families and on the street and have role models who do not control adequately their aggressive impulses and do not suppress their anger. In addition, it should be pointed out that in the last ten years Roma more often compared to the rest of the Bulgarian citizens have also become victims of institutional violence. Apart from our observations, we were also told stories of violence by our respondents. Here are some examples:

A 41 years old man from Nikola Kochev neighborhood, divorced. He has two married children, who live separate from him. Our respondent has graduated 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

*“Most of the people are unemployed, they don’t have qualification and now after the close down of the factories they became very poor. No one offer jobs and people here are used to work in factories. Now everybody relies on social aid – people take some money to pay their debts Men go to and fro all day long trying to find work, but there are no vacant jobs. Then they go back home and the quarrels begin. The wife would start shouting that the kids are hungry and that if her husband were a real man he would be able to earn his family living. Once he would stay calm, but the next time he wouldn’t stand it and would beat his wife. Then he’d steal something and would be arrested... They made it so that the minority should die!”*

A 32 years old woman, unemployed, married, with two children. She has primary education.

*“Our life became very difficult, especially after we were discharged, and we started to have conflicts at home all the time. When I worked in the factory I used to come home in the evening and I hardly found enough time to take care of the kids, to cook the dinner, to wash the clothes, to clean the house... It was the same for my husband – he would come home tired, turn on the TV and take his*

*beer – there was no time for quarrels. Now we don't work and we stay home all day long. The kid doesn't go to the kindergarten, because we can't pay the tax, and the conflicts start... On any occasion! We got very nervous and started blaming each other for this... The same happens in all families. You see that toothless woman over there? Her husband beats her every night. It's not like this at home, but we also turned into beasts..."*

A 33 years old woman with primary education. She worked in various enterprises – in a textile factory, in a butcher's shop, in the *Dynamo* plant. Now she is unemployed and divorced. She lives with a man but they do not have a legal marriage. She has 4 children.

*"How do I bring up my kids? I shout at them as every mother does. Their father is much stricter with them. But we never beat them. When I was a kid it happened that my parents hit me from time to time.*

*My husband and I get on together very well. We help each other with the housework and never quarrel. He never hit me. I don't think it's normal that the man beats his wife. My ex-husband used to beat me and we didn't get along at all. It's true that men have more rights than women.*

*Recently there was a case here when a man was killed because he kidnapped a girl from another town and made her become a prostitute. However, there's no domestic violence in the neighborhood... Last night the police arrested a man, who cut his father's fingers and scarred his sister... We get on with our neighbors well, but the others kick up big rows and even fight with each other."*

A 48 years old woman. She graduated 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Our respondent works as a tailor. She is married and has 2 children.

*"There should be equality between men and women. It's not so in our family. My husband never did housework. He scolds me and sometimes even beats me. I don't think it's normal. When I make a remark I should speak quietly, because he might get angry. Now it is worse than before. We're all very nervous and men get mad more often..."*

*The man may get drunk and come home in the morning, but the woman can't do this. This is the rule and if a young woman doesn't keep to it, then there will be a divorce.*

*There's more violence among young people.*

*I'm the one who takes care for the children. I'm a strict mother but I've never beaten them. Sometimes I don't give them breakfast and don't let them out for punishment. I was punished too, never severely, though."*

A 34 years old woman from Topolchane, married, with 4 children and 7 grandchildren. She has graduated 7<sup>th</sup> grade in the village school and is unemployed

*"Violence is everything bad which people do to you. When they beat you it's violence. When you're offended it's violence too. It happens everywhere - here and at the mayor's office too. At home my husband beats me and calls me names too.*



*Teachers beat our children. That's why we don't send them to school very often. Well, kids also fight each other in their games. But they also fight on ethnic basis. Our children come from school and cry - what can they do?...*

*I was punished this way too. They used to beat me. What's more I had a stepmother. I wanted to study. But she beat me and didn't let me go to school. So, I married. Now I don't beat my kids, my husband either. He might slap them if they're naughty. They fight each other, but only within the norm.*

*Of course, man and woman aren't equal. Man is something more than the woman. A woman cannot treat a man the way he treats her. He can beat me and scold me. I can't do this to him. Even if he's weaker than me - I still can't. If a young woman doesn't behave properly, she would be punished.*

*The rule is that men beat women. It isn't normal only if he's drunk. But it happens very often. Younger families fight more often. The older ones are somehow more mellowed by time. Younger men beat women if they're angry at something.*

*There are often quarrels between neighbors here - we shout and curse at each other. For example, I and my mother-in-law haven't talked to each other for 5 years. We never fought, though. It happened because they beat my daughter and got mad - how can they beat my child!*

*There's no such violence in our village (sexual - V. T.). But I think that men can also be victims. It can only happen when a man is drunk. A father can rape his daughter only if he's her stepfather. But it's normal because he has no relation with her. Such things happen but not here.*

*Otherwise, everybody's rude to us - Gypsies. We always have problems with the doctor - she doesn't give us milk and medicines. And my son-in-law was beaten by policemen. His friends betrayed him. The policemen came here and arrested him. They beat him many times but he was innocent. They always beat innocent people. And curse. It's the same like everywhere - the police hates Gypsies. I also heard about violence in the army. They beat them and kill them. What's more in the army they don't make difference between Gypsies and Bulgarians - they torture everybody younger.*

*Look, Gypsies are the most oppressed. Nobody gives us money and work. I was fine when I had a job. I was a vine-grower. It was in 1982. I haven't worked for 17 years. And it's the worst now. Just look around - how can I be happy?"*

A 28 years old man, married, with 2 children. He has secondary education and is a qualified mason and casting worker. He has been unemployed since 1992. Now he is a pastor in a family church in the neighborhood

*"My parents have never beat me. I don't beat my kids badly too- only slap them from time to time, but that's for good. Sometimes I punish them to stay home for several days and that's all.*

*I think that the man should have more rights - to be head of the family. The woman cannot take decisions alone. There must be some order. Sometimes the man can help the woman. If a young girl doesn't observe the rules - there would be a divorce. It is somehow inappropriate if a woman controls things.*

*Men shouldn't beat women, because this creates problems. But if she did something wrong he might beat her, not that it's right but that's how it happens. If she went to another man her husband might beat her - he must do so in such a case. This is not violence - she deserves it. Young people have fights more often because they aren't mature and wise enough... As for the sexual violence - everything is possible nowadays, but such things don't happen here. Well, it happens that a girl is raped by her stepfather. But if she starts crying her mother will save her. If she stays calm then she has against it...*

*As for the school, well, teachers punish the kids but this is actually their job. They might have been reasons for that. This is not violence. They used to beat me at school too. Because I didn't go regularly."*

A 80 years old woman, a pensioner. She is a widow. Her son has died. She has grandchildren but does not remember their number.

*You shouldn't ask me - I'm too old. What about violence? It's when somebody hit me or raped me. I expect such things from the Gypsies here. They get drunk and smash my windows... I'm old and live alone...*

*I don't know about men and women. Every family is different. Men and women should be equal. They should work equally to earn their living. They fight each other on the TV too - it's a real shame. It might be wrong, but women started to know more than men do. They should listen to one another. Only women can be tortured. How can I torture a man - he's stronger.*

*My husband didn't beat me too much. As for the kids - I slapped them from time to time. I was stupid enough. People mustn't hurt each other but it might be necessary sometimes. When parents beat their children it's for good. You shouldn't call it violence. Mothers never want to harm their children.*

*My parents have never beaten me. They were wonderful. We were 5 kids in the family. And they have never beaten us.*

*The relations between neighbors here are bad too. My evil neighbor died recently. We've had problems with him. He died at the age of 90. He should have died much earlier. He always did me harm - telling lies about me - but I had a good husband, who never trusted my neighbor. However, it's bad when the whole village speaks about you..."*

A 54 years old woman, married, with 4 children. She has graduated only 1<sup>st</sup> grade and worked in the agricultural cooperative. She has been unemployed since 1992.

*"Everything is violence. My son beats me. Not my husband - my son. I stay calm; what can I say? My husband tells him it's no good, but when he goes out my son get twice as mad.*

*Our kids are big. I don't remember if we used to beat them. We pulled their ears but never beat them much. Now nobody beats our grandchildren, only that my son beats me.*

*It's important that there is equality at home. But we can't be completely equal. If a girl doesn't follow the rules there will be a divorce"*

A 34 years old man. He has elementary education and qualification as an engine truck driver. A present he is unemployed. Our respondent is married and has 5 children.

*"I prefer to teach my children with words. At first I explain to kid his mistake, but if he does the same mistake for a second time I beat him, because the God said so.*

*Men and women can't be equal. They are completely different. Women have no rights according to God's rule. They should wash, clean, cook and iron the clothes, while men have to earn the family's living.*

*Men have the right to beat women if they did not obey the rules... It doesn't happen very often in our neighborhood Younger families have more problems.*

*It also happens that a woman rapes a boy. Seven years ago street prostitutes had stopped an acquaintance of mine and offered him things for some money. He refused and the four of them started to beat him and take his clothes off. Then one of them hit him in the head and took his money.*

*It's not violence if the husband beat his wife and kids at home. Violence is what comes from the others like fighting, raping, harassment in the army and beating by the police. There's a lot of violence in the Bulgarian army. When officers see that you're Roma they start to torture you. And Bulgarian soldiers make us do the dirtiest work. One boy committed suicide because he couldn't stand it.*

*There's no equality. They don't respect us especially after 1989. Turks, who used to be at the lowest level, now became more respected and we become isolated. We're the first to be dismissed when there're cuts in the staff and then nobody gives us work. But I don't think that there is a risk for ethnic conflict.*

*What about school? The teacher beats the kids from time to time, but only if they didn't listen to her. On the other hand, kids also fight each other."*

## **Main conclusions from the interviews with Roma**

Although not purporting to be representative, the survey conducted in 1999 in 5 big Roma neighborhoods is typological and allows the research group to track some tendencies with respect to the change in the demographic behavior of the Roma during the years of transition to market economy. The analysis below is based on the on 570 semi-standardized interviews with Roma, together with the information from interviews with social workers, doctors, teachers, mayors and other state and local authority officials and the information from additional in-depth interviews conducted in March 2000.

### **A. Demographic characteristics:**

The demographic characteristics of Roma in the urban districts and the villages included in the study are extremely diverse. Even within one and the same big Roma neighborhood we often observe different types of demographic behavior of its residents. Such tendencies exist in the Nikola Kochev district in Sliven, and to a less extent in the Nadezhda district and in the village of Topolchane. The inner stratification and the divisions between the various Roma sub-groups in those big neighborhoods determine the group variety in the demographic characteristics of their residents.

In the group of the long settled “Bulgarian Gypsies” in the Nikola Kochev district in Sliven and in the village of Topolchane for at least three decades there has been a tendency towards later marriages among the young Roma, a steady orientation towards a family model of two children and a comparatively higher marriage stability. These Roma sub-groups have a higher life expectancy, which rates are close to the average for the country. The share of individuals over the age of 60 years is close to that of Bulgarians. Infant mortality is comparatively lower.

In the same time there has been deterioration in the demographic characteristics of the poorest residents of the so-called “Jungle” - the poorest part of the Nikola Kochev district - and of the Gypsy neighborhood in Topolchane. In the last few years those characteristics grew closer to the ones of the Nadezhda ghetto in Sliven. It has to be taken into consideration that a significant part of the residents of this “ghetto within the ghetto” in Sliven have moved there in the last 10 years. It is also important to point out that their share in the neighborhood is gradually increasing and already exceeds 2/5 of the population in the “nice” Roma district in Sliven. Many of the newcomers simply reproduce the family model of the “naked” Gypsies from the Nadezhda district, where they came from.

The sharp deterioration in the living conditions of these poor people did not lead to a tendency towards later marriages and a decrease in the number of children. On the contrary, the number of marriages between people below the age of 16 years grew higher. There is also an increasing number of under age mothers and of prematurely born children. The rates of the infant mortality are very high. 18% of our youngest respondents declared that there has been a case of child's death in their family. This is characteristic namely of the poorest families. There has been an increase in the share of traditional marriages among the young Roma, as well as of the deserted mothers and divorces. The mortality rate among men has grown higher not only in the age group of 50 years but also in the group of 40 years old.

Although less intensive these processes are also observed among Roma in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo, where the cases migration from other villages and urban ghettos are very rare. Up till 5-6 years ago 2-3 children family model was the most spread in Roma families in the site. However,

now it starts being neglected by the young families which change to 3-4 children family model. There are 3.6 children at average in the Roma families in Gorno Alexandrovo. Only in Nikola Kochev district in Sliven the average number of children per family was lower - 2.7.

The most unfavorable demographic characteristics were observed among the groups of “naked”, “gradeshki” and “bebrovski” Roma in the Nadezhda district in Sliven and among the Roma in the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane (the majority of them belong to the group of “naked”). They reproduce the typical Roma model of demographic behavior (Due to the lack reliable statistical data I find it difficult to tell whether there had been changes in the birth rates among the “naked” Gypsies during the communist period. According to the study of Roma in Sliven held in 1966 by Prof. Ivanichka Geogieva Wallachian Gypsies from the Nadezhda district usually had 9 children per family. In mind of the fact that Prof. Georgieva worked basically in the Nikola Kochev district, where the family model of two and three children per family has been adopted since the 60s, in the above study she only made a parallel between her respondents and the “naked” Gypsies without any particular data about the latter. The results from our fieldwork show a considerably lower number of children in the groups of 50-59 years old and 60+ years old Roma. Nearly half of our respondents at the ages between 50 and 59 years have 3 or 2 children, 1/5 of them have 4 children and the rest - 5 and more children. 2/5 of our respondents over the age of 60 years have 5 and more children, but the share of representatives of this age group with 2-3 children is still considerably high.)

Young people in the group of “naked” marry at a very early age - usually before the age of 16 years. Practically there are no single individuals. Even handicapped and mentally retarded representatives of the group marry early and usually have many children. Marriages within the group are considerably stable. There is a high share of couples, who live together without a civic marriage. Families have many children as a rule, however, due to the high rates of infant mortality in the group the number of children per family is between 4 and 7. The mortality rates among women at the age of fertility and among men over the age of 40 years are very high.

Nowadays most of the Gypsy women from marginalized groups rely on the big number of children for having some incomes. 51% of the Gypsies in the village of Topolchane rely on children allowances and social help as a main source of income for the family budget. This is true also for 45% of the Roma in village of Sotirya and for 43% of the inhabitants of Nadezhda district in Sliven. For this reason the number of children in our respondents' families is the biggest in the village of Sotirya and immediately after it - in Nadezhda ghetto and Topolchane - respectively 4.6, 4.3 and 4.2 children per family. Around 40% of the families in these ghettos have from 5 to 9 children.

During the survey the research group found that one unfavorable tendency became more pronounced – the decrease in the percentage of civil marriages within the Roma community and the increase of the so-called “traditional marriages” (out of wedlock). These cases became more and more frequent in the last few years, which led to an increase in women's poverty and to the heavy situation of children in the deserted families. Young Roma between the age of 17-19 years conclude a civil marriage 2-2.5 times less frequently than adults. In the Roma neighborhoods included in the study hardly 37% of the young Roma concluded a civil marriage, against 90% of the Roma individuals over the age of 50 and 76% of those at the age of 39-40 years. In the same time 55% of the youngest group (between the age of 17-19 years) declared that they had a traditional marriage. Krammer's coefficient, showing the dependency between the age of the respondents and the type of their marriage is quite high ( $K=0.267$ ).

The second unfavorable tendency concerns the increase in the early marriages, again among the youngest Roma ( $K=0.138$ ). 60% of the respondents in the group of the 17- to 29-year-olds got married before reaching the age of 16. As for the other age groups, the early marriages are characteristic of about 48% of the respondents. This tendency is not displayed in all Roma groups, but it is growing under the conditions of increasing poverty within the Roma community. It is alarming that we have been registering it in our surveys more and more often after 1994.

The third unfavorable tendency is the tendency towards an increase in the number of children in the group of the poorest Roma, the Roma who are least able to support their children. Being unable to provide nourishing food, good medical care and suitable education for their children, the poor parents condemn their children to poverty too – a typical characteristic feature of underclass. In the case study of Roma conducted in 1994 I already found this tendency. It is disturbing that it is getting more and more pronounced and steady, encompassing significant parts of the Roma community. As an evidence for the increased birth rate we could quote some data from the Regional Office of Statistics for Topolchane and analyze them. At January 1999 the number of the village's children at the age between 0 and 6 years old was 365, of those at the age between 7 to 14 years old - 317, and of the 15-17 years old - 128. I.e., during the first half of the 1980's there were 42.7 children at average born annually in Topolchane, at the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's - an average of 39.6 children per year, and during the last 7 years - 52.1 children per year. The predominant part of the children born in the village in the last 10 years is Roma. Young Bulgarians are few, and they sustainably shift to a one-child model. The increased number of newborn children in the village is completely due to the increased birth rate among Roma. High birth rate is both a marker and reason for their impoverishment. Similar processes of increase in the birth rate in the last few years are also observed among Roma from Sotirya and Gorno Alexandrovo (according to data from the Regional Statistics). Our observations also show the same tendency in the Nadezhda district in Sliven, however, the research team cannot provide official statistical data in proof of the above.

Table 4 below presents summarized demographic characteristics of the sites, included in the present study.

**Table 4**

**Structure of the demographic behavior of Roma in the sites, included in the present study (%)**

Characteristics	Nadezhda	Nikola Kochev	Sotirya	Topolchane	Gorno Alexandrovo
Average age of marriage - Women	14.1	16.2	14.0	14.0	15.1
Average age of marriage - Men	15.2	17.5	14.9	15.1	17.2
Number of children per	4.3	2.7	4.6	4.3	3.6

family					
Desired number of children	3.4	2.6	2.5	3.0	2.1

*Note: The information about the average age of marriage of young people in the last 5 years was gathered by the interviewed through the following questions: **At what age did young men from your neighborhood usually marry in the last five years?** and **At what age did young women from your neighborhood usually marry in the last five years?**; i.e. the above data present the opinion of the interviewed about the average age of consent in their neighborhood and they are not the actually estimated rates. The above data about the desired number of children refer to all the age groups, included in the study.*

The fourth unfavorable tendency has to do with the increase in the percentage of deserted mothers, divorced women who raise their children on their own; and relatively young widows who also raise their small children alone. Gender is a very important variable in defining the family status of the Roma individuals ( $K=0.215$ ). 88% of the male respondents are married, as compared to 78% of the female respondents. Women tend to be widowed 7 times more frequently than men (13,4% of the female respondents against 1,8% of the male respondents) and to re-marry two times less frequently after their husband's desertion or death.

The fifth tendency among Roma is towards gradual departure from the nuclear family model and survival within the boundaries of the extended family. This is a result both of the impossibility for the young families to buy or build their own separate homes and of the necessity small incomes of more people to be accumulated in the name of the family survival.

## **B. Education**

The level of education among Roma in the studied neighborhoods varies significantly on the basis of the in-group differences in the community; of the type of settlement - completely isolated and segregated neighborhoods and less isolated and even ethnically mixed suburbs; of gender and age characteristics of the respondents.

The level of education is considerably high in the group of the long settled Christian Roma in the Nikola Kochev district and to a less degree - among Roma in the village of Topolchane. There is a marked tendency towards assimilation in the above two groups. Those groups have been in closer contact with Bulgarians and have been long ago and most fully integrated in the industrial sector. For more than a century and a half they have adopted the lesson that education provides better job opportunities and higher social status.

Table 4 provides information about the differences in the level of education between the various Roma sub-groups - as far as most of the residents of Nikola Kochev district belong to the group of Bulgarian Gypsies and those in Nadezhda district, Sotirya and Topolchane - to the group of "naked". Here it is also important to mention that Roma in the Nikola Kochev district and in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo are not so strongly subjected to segregation and isolation as those in the Nadezhda ghetto, Topolchane and Sotirya.

**Table 5****Educational structure of Roma in the sites, included in the present study (%)**

Education	Nadezhda	Nikola Kochev	Sotirya	Topolchane	Gorno Alexandrovo
Illiterate	29	8	51	40	24
Primary	26	22	32	27	32
Elementary	35	52	15	32	32
Secondary	10	15	2	1.5	12
University /College	-	2.5	-	-	-

The educational level of our respondents' spouses is similar to the above described and to the same extent low. Those from the group of "naked Gypsies" in the Nadezhda ghetto, Topolchane and Sotirya have the lowest level of education.

The "naked" Roma very often reject education as a group characteristics and value. When I was asking them insistently why they did not study further during the communist rule when their parents had jobs, education was free of charge and there were numerous social benefits for pupils, besides the traditional mention of poverty, the "naked" Roma often replied, "*We are not much into study, the Bulgarians, they are*"; "*What's the use? Sure I won't become a teacher.*" These replies show the passive resistance to the "Bulgarian" model of way of life and values enforced upon them. You can force one to go to school but it is not so easy to make them study. These answers also show clear example of an established "opposite cultural model"; similar to the one observed among Afro-American in the big urban ghettos in the United States. (See W. Wilson, 1999; D. Massey and N. Denton, 1993)

The dependency between the level of education and the gender of the respondents is strong ( $K=0.319$ ). The Roma men have higher education than the Roma women. They remained illiterate three times less frequently than women, and completed secondary education three and a half times more frequently than women. 47% of the Roma men have completed elementary education, against 32% of the women. Only within the small group of higher education graduates the number of women is a little bit higher than the number of men. The gender structure of education is shown in table 6 below:

**Table 6**



### Gender structure of education of 570 interviewed Roma (%)

	Illiterate	Primary (1-4 grade)	Elementary (5-8 grade)	Secondary (9-12 grade)	University/ College
Men	12	23	47	17	0.5
Women	34	28	32	5	1

The correlation between the education and the age of the respondents is low ( $K=0.127$ ). What is worrying is that within the group of the young Roma (the 17- to 29-year-olds) there are more illiterates and persons with primary education than within the group of the 30- to 49-year-olds. Roma over the age of 60 years have the lowest level of education - 1/3 of them are completely illiterate, and another 1/3 - functionally illiterate. It has to be pointed out, however, that this age group is very small - in our study it was represented by 37 respondents, mostly women, over the age of 60 years.

8% of our respondents studied in boarding schools. Those individuals usually have at least elementary education. Roma boys are more often sent to boarding schools compared to girls - 11% men against 6% women. In the majority of cases our respondents, who graduated from boarding schools, belong to the age group of the 40-49-year-olds - 13% against 6% of the interviewed between the ages of 17 and 29 years and 0% of those over 60 years.

In the last few years there has been an alarming tendency towards increase in the share of Roma pupils dropping out from school. According to the results from our interviews with Roma parents 10% of the families in Nikola Kochev district do not send their children to school. The above tendency refers to 35% of the Roma families in the Nadezhda ghetto, 40% of the families in Sotirya, 25% - in Topolchane and 22% - in Gorno Alexandrovo. It should be pointed out that the above figures are strongly reduced by the interviewed. Roma parents from the group of "naked" do not accept the officially determined school age for children - from 7 to 16 years. They very often consider their children too young for school even at the age of 9 years and stop their girls from school when they become sexually mature. In the village of Sotirya, where the local school is primary (up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade), Roma parents declare that their children have completed their education after primary grade.

All of our respondents, who declared that their children have dropped out from school, were asked about the reasons for this. The most frequent explanation they gave was the lack of money for buying shoes, clothes and teaching materials for the children. Many children told us that especially in winter they are freezing in their homes and are not able to get out of the beds and to go to school without shoes. The impoverishment of most Gypsy families will have a serious effect on the ability of parents to provide some education for their children for a long time to come.

Many parents, mostly in Sliven, are discouraged, that the higher level of education will help their children to find job. They assert, that the drastic shrinkage of the employment market and the compounding of discriminatory attitudes towards the Roma make it very difficult even for qualified Roma to keep their jobs and that is why there is no sense to send children to school. They pass their skeptical attitude to their children and form in them the conviction that their destiny does not depend on them, that in their country they will be condemned to misery, no matter what they do. This will lead to inherited poverty in the Roma community and further underclass formation mainly among Roma. Our data confirm the observations of the school aspirations of pupils from the big urban

ghettoes in the United States with the only difference that Roma children in Bulgaria drop out from school at an earlier age and after a shorter period of education.

In many of the interviewed families children were involved in income generation, but only 5% of the parents declared that this was the reason to stop the children from school. On the other hand, according to school head masters this is a basic factor for Roma children's dropping out from school after elementary grade and even earlier. They point out the fact that very often boys under the age of 18 years are preferred as workers by private employers, who thus avoid official labor contracts and payment of social insurance. However, in many cases these are the only working family members. In many poor Roma families children collect scrap and herbs. The girls help mothers as baby-sitters, and in the housekeeping.

Another reason for the tendency among Roma children towards early dropping out from school is cut in the social benefits for pupils in the post-communist period. As from 1989, most of the social benefits which pupils availed themselves of, such as free or almost free food, clothes, textbooks, etc., were abolished. Most of the representatives of the Roma community very often interpreted this as a discriminatory measure intended mainly against them, as they have more children and are in a more difficult social position. They often see the shrinking of social benefits for education as a breach on the part of the state of a tacit agreement, in accordance with which they would let their children go to Bulgarian schools if the State takes on all or most of the expenses for their maintenance while they are at school. In almost all of their spontaneous or organized protests against government social policy in recent years, the main slogan "*We won't let our children go to school if the State won't do anything for us*" has been raised as a threat.

But the general impoverishment of the families is not the only reason for children's dropping out from school. If this was true, we could hardly explain the low educational level of adult Roma, who were at school age in the "better times". It is true that part of the Roma, especially "the naked", have been extremely poor under the socialism too, although at present they tend to idealize that period. However, its social benefits provided opportunities for education without any burden to the family budget. Nevertheless, the level of education among Roma included in our study, and among the group of "naked" in particular, is very low. It is basically due to the established "opposition culture" among "naked" Gypsies in the isolated neighborhoods. This culture is based on the rejection of Bulgarian values, which are considered discriminative, and on the practical exclusion of the "naked" Gypsies from the society.

Two tendencies are seen among the "Bulgarian Gypsies" in Sliven Roma districts. There is a school drop tide among the children of the ex-workers with primary and secondary education level. The main reason is that the parents have serious financial problems and cannot afford the purchase of school items. The second reason is the lack of motivation for education. Parents are convinced that it doesn't matter if their children will complete basic or secondary education – there is no job for a Gypsy! Another reason for dropout is the early marriage, which is also a common practice among the impoverished Roma groups. There are evening classes in the Sliven local school, enabling the young people who were married early to continue their education and those who wish could follow them as private students. However, the number of applicants for those classes is very small.

Meanwhile the Roma elite in town districts /intellectuals, rich merchants and artists/ make their best to give their children the opportunity to study and to receive a school-leaving certificate from the most prestigious schools in Sliven and even in the bigger towns. According to NGO data over 300

young Roma from all over the country apply for scholarships to continue their studies in the universities and colleges after completing their secondary education. Almost one third of them are from Sliven.

### C. Health

The health status of Roma in the sites we studied is alarming, as it is in the whole country. There are chronically sick members in 63% of the interviewed Roma families – many of whom – children. Most frequently these are cases of heart diseases, followed by diseases of the joints and bronchitis. Apart from these, 15% of the families declared that they had handicapped members with medical certificates, who received pensions for invalidity. So the total share of families with sick people becomes 78%. These do not include disabled and mentally retarded individuals, because the respondents did not consider them sick as far as they do not suffer.

The health status of people sharply deteriorated due to the increasing poverty and the continual stress to which all Bulgarians are subjected. This is especially true for the Gypsies.

Our study showed an obvious correlation between the rate of impoverishment in the Roma neighborhood and the health status of its residents. It has to be mentioned here that the irregular visits at hospital make it difficult to register the actual number chronically sick and handicapped among Roma and that the low health culture of the illiterate Roma hampers their adequate assessment of their own health status. Table 7 shows the self-assessment of the health status of Roma families in the sites, included in the present study:

**Table 7**

**Self-assessment of the health status of Roma families in the sites, included in the present study (%)**

	Nadezhda	Nikola Kochev	Sotirya	Topolchane	Gorno Alexandrovo
“we are healthy”	53	41	37.5	59	36.5
“we have a poor health”	33	37	50	25	37
“there are chronically sick member/s in the family”	67	57	63	52	80
“there are handicapped member/s in the family”	19	17	8	12	15
“the children are not vaccinated”	21	1	18	14	5
“a case of child’s death in the family”	28	14	21	30	17

Our respondents, who described their health status as rather poor were mainly women and much rarely men (the Krammer's coefficient for gender based assessment of the health status is 0.171). On the other hand, men more often declared that their children were not vaccinated ( $K=0.178$ ). It is possible that the above difference is due to the worse informedness of men, because in the Roma family it is mother's duty to take care of children's health. But this might be also due to the fact that men are more honest, being saved the frequent reminding and even warnings on part of health workers as regards to the obligatory vaccination of children.

There is a clearly expressed correlation between the age and the health status of Roma ( $K=0.214$ ). Younger community representatives more often declared that they had a good health status. 58% of our respondents over the age of 50 years declared that their health status was "bad" and even "very bad". The number of handicapped and chronically sick members is also smaller among the younger Roma families.

In parallel with the deterioration of their health, however, year by year Roma become less and less able to cover the increasing expenses for medical treatment and medicines. 89% of the Roma declared that they are not able to pay for the medicines prescribed. With respect to this the situation seems to be the worse among Roma in Topolchane and Sotirya, where respectively 97% and 92% of the interviewed declared that they could not afford buying medicines (against 62% of the interviewed in Nikola Kochev district). Sometimes they buy a little portion of the medicine and when they feel better, they just stop taking it thus making the illness chronic. In other cases they buy medicines only when the children fall ill. Parents are still entitled to free medicines for babies up to 1 year old and to a discount in the price of the medicines for children under the age of 7. However, due to the bad financial situation in the municipalities, the number of drug-stores providing free of charge medicines is growing less, especially in the end of the year, as it became clear from our interviews with Roma and doctors held in March 2000.

This explains the popular method of self-treatment with aspirin, *rakia* (grape brandy) and herbs, or the other well-tried practice of insisting to be admitted to hospital in order to use free treatment as socially disadvantaged. In the last two years members of 61% of the interviewed families have been hospitalized for different periods of time. There were some cases when their children stayed in the hospital for several months. But usually the hospitals do not have the necessary medicines and supplies. Patients are treated for free in cases of emergency. However, after the third day of the treatment, or after the acute stage of the disease passes, they have to pay for the medicines. The treatment has to be free also in cases when the patient is a member of a very poor family. But in the hospital in Kardzhali even the very poor persons could not be provided with free medicines. The bad financial situation of Sliven's hospital was the reason why this hospital stopped providing free medicines too.

In half of the cases of hospitalization, Roma were asked to pay for the medicines and supplies, and in 15% - to pay for the medical services. 27% of the in-patients had to buy their food, too.

The tendency of going to a doctor only in emergency cases increases. More than a half of the interviewees declared that that was the practice they followed during the last few years. Very often the postponed or rare visits to the doctor lead to various complications or chronification of the diseases among Roma.

14% of our respondents (or members of their families, mainly babies) go to regular medical checks. Those, who visit doctors most rarely, belong to the age groups of the youngest - 12% against 25% of the interviewed over the age of 50 years. This difference is not only due to the better health status of younger people, but also to the established habit among the adult Roma to take care of their health.

Sometimes the unwillingness to go and see a doctor when they obviously need qualified medical help is due not only to lack of money but to the frustration related to the increasing bureaucratization and the deterioration of the quality of the medical services in Bulgaria. The shortage of funds for medical and laboratory supplies is the reason why patients have to pay for this type of services, which Roma view as corruption of the medical staff.

The introduction of paid medical services increased the bureaucratic red tape in the medical service sphere. This had worst impact on the people residing in settlements, which do not have a medical center run by a physician. The village doctor assistant is obliged to send the ill person to the doctor in the near-by bigger village who provides medical services to several villages. If the doctor considers that the person should undergo a specialized medical test or a check-up, then s/he refers the patient to the specialists at the regional polyclinic in town. The patients can go and see only the doctor they have specifically been referred to. If this particular doctor is off duty and the patient decides to replace him/her with another doctor, then the patient has to pay. Only the doctor at the town polyclinic can decide whether the patient needs in-patient treatment and should be hospitalized.

The sick persons often do not want to waste so much time in waiting a referral for an in-patient treatment and that is why they go directly to the hospital for a medical check-up. In this case, however, they have to pay for the check-up and treatment. These services are also subject to payment if the sick persons are referred to the hospital for in-patient treatment by private practice doctors.

The wasting of time while going to a doctor, then to another doctor, etc. is the most frequent reason for complaint with the medical services during the last few years. People also very frequently complain that the medical establishments refuse to send an ambulance to the Roma districts when called by telephone. The medical staff explains these refusals with the severe budget limitations and that the hospitals are constantly running into debts for gas for the ambulances. The Roma do not accept those explanations as valid. They are convinced that the ambulances do not come to the Roma districts due to the racist attitude of the medical staff.

The Roma tend to interpret all changes in health care with respect to the introduction of paid medical services as discriminatory measures against the Roma. Each requirement for payment of medical supplies, medicines or other services is interpreted only as a manifestation of the racism, corruption and heartlessness of the Bulgarians regardless of the fact that those requirements are applicable to all patients. This often leads to very strong emotional reactions, which additionally strain the relations between the Roma and the people who treat them at the medical establishments. We were surprised to hear some Roma openly speaking about their fear that doctors do everything possible “to kill them”. A 52 years old man with 4 alive children and one dead son, and 5 grandchildren, and who has experienced also the tragedy to loose a grandchild, was complaining the pediatrician was constantly accepted Bulgarians for consultation while he and his daughter were waiting to pay attention to his sick grandchild. His comment was the following: “Racists! They want to kill our children! But we are masters, we make more children and never become less!” Another man from Nadezhda ghetto to the question what he did when the pediatrician didn’t pay proper attention to him and made him wait for a long time in front of the cabinet, answered: “What should I do? I kept silent, because instead of

medicines, she could give me some poison!” It is striking that poverty, hopelessness and rejection by the society of the Roma in recent years have evoked in them a horror that they are endangered community, which could survive only at a price of high birth rate on a mass scale, of self-enclosing and reducing contacts with the dangerous “Gadjo” to the necessary minimum. The level of rejection of the “other” and their dehumanizing that we observed in the both direction - among Roma against Bulgarians, and among Bulgarians against Roma - is striking too.

We cannot maintain that there is no corruption among Bulgarian doctors, it’s simply not true. But the majority of the doctors is really guided in their work by highly humane moral principles and is ready to do their best for their patients, irrespective of their ethnic origin. The trained nurses we interviewed, however, expressed a more marked slighting attitude to the Roma and obvious irritation, and they are the people who come first in contact with the patient.

The attitude of Roma towards doctors is very ambivalent. They are aware that when a person or their children are very ill, they should go and see a doctor, but also, according to Roma, doctors can do you harm, all the more that “all Bulgarians are racists”. When there is no other alternative left, one should go to see a doctor but better take precautions before that. Midwives often cannot figure out why the young Roma mothers at the maternity home keep tearing strands of thread from the hospital gowns and fix them with spittle on the foreheads of their babies. They simply make charms against the evil eye, convinced that their baby has problems not because it is prematurely born but because Bulgarians have “evil eyes” and have put an evil spell on their baby.

However, in case of great difficulty, when there is no alternative, the Roma place their absolute trust in the doctor. Many mothers said that they could afford to keep the state of their health good and that is why they do not go to the doctor when they are sick but do everything possible to ensure medical treatment for their children. Most often people borrow money for medicines from the neighborhood money-lenders at exorbitant interest rate – 100% for the first month, 200% for the second month and 400% for the third month. A 43-year-old man from Nadezhda ghetto told us this story: “The child was very sick. I took him to hospital. There they said: “We would take him, but you should pay for the medicines.” I didn’t have money, so I left the child in front of the surgery and I went home. Then, I took him back three weeks later.” In all pediatric wards in all hospitals in the country one can see such “abandoned” Roma children, who are treated at the hospitals for weeks on end without anybody coming to look for them out of fear that somebody will make them pay excessive expenses. Parents come to take their children home when the children recovered from the illness.

Almost nobody of the 570 Roma individuals interviewed in the summer of 1999 has heard of the forthcoming reform in the sphere of health services. They did not have any information about health insurance and it is very likely that part of them will remain uninsured, because they are neither registered at the labor offices as unemployed, nor are they paying their self-insurance. The fact that part of the Roma are not officially registered as permanent residents of the sites they live in might also lead to future problems related to the utilization of health care services.

#### **D. Economic status**

According to data from the present study (August 1999) 80% of the interviewed Roma are unemployed. 26% of them never started working. Another 21% have been unemployed for more than

10 years, 34% - from 5 to 9 years, another 11% - from 2 to 4 years and hardly 8% have lost their jobs in the last 12 months. The situation is different for the particular neighborhoods

**Table 8**  
**Unemployment duration structure (%)**

Unemployed for	Nadezhda district	Nikola Kochev district	Sotirya	Topolchane	Gorno Alexandrovo
up to 1 year	10	13	0	3	7
2-4 years	8	14	0	7	43
5-9 years	52	41	60	50	23
more than 10 years	5	11	11	4	3
never worked	26	22	29	36	23

The present study shows interesting tendencies in the analysis of employment in the big Roma neighborhoods. There is a very strong correlation employment and gender of our respondents. The Krammer's coefficient for the gender distribution of the respondents in the various industrial sectors is 0.249. Men are hired by private employers for permanent, temporary or casual work, which is the basic type of employment in the community, 3 to 5 times more often than women are. Roma men more often run their own private business, in which their wives are unpaid workers. A very small percentage of Roma of both sexes are involved in the state sector and the cooperatives, where men again have better chances to find work. Women are comparatively more often hired on the Temporary Employment Program, however this tendency depends on the season, as well as on the number of vacant jobs.

The unemployment rates are higher among women compared to men. According to data from our study 86% of the unemployed are women against 72% - men (it should be pointed out here that part of the younger women on a maternity leave do not register as unemployed, mainly due to their lack of information about the necessary procedures). Up until recently the three years of maternity leave were considered length of service and were paid. Now in most of the cases mothers receive only children's allowances, but their maternity leave cannot be part of the length of service if they have not been employed during their pregnancy.

There is a strong correlation between the duration of unemployment and gender ( $K=0.214$ ). According to results from our interviews men have lost their jobs comparatively later than women have. 10% of the interviewed men and 7% of the women have become unemployed in the last year. 14% of the men and 9% of the women have been unemployed from 2 to 4 years. Long-term unemployment is more widely spread among women compared to men. 16% of the interviewed men and 32% of the women have never had a job. The latter indicator significantly differs from the average rates of the country, where for several decades now Bulgarian and Turkish women have followed a firm tendency of 100% employment in the public sector. This difference can be explained with the higher birth rates among Roma, with the traditional perception in some Roma sub-groups that maids and married women are supposed to work with other men, as well as with the poor health status of Roma women. In the same time, according to data from the social assistance services, the official rates of unemployment among Roma women are lower than the average for the regions included in our study. Obviously at present a significant part of them are not registered as

unemployed for various reasons - lack of permanent residence; frequent births; higher rates of physical disability; dropping out from the statistics due to irregular registration, especially in the summer, etc.

One of the basic reasons for the higher rates and the longer duration of unemployment among Roma women is their lower qualification. The Krammer's coefficient for the correspondence between qualification and gender of our respondents is 0.421! The number of Roma men with professional qualification is three times higher than this of women - respectively 59% against 18%.

We observe an extremely strong dependency between employment and the age of the respondents ( $K=0.378$ ). The youngest Roma, the age group of 17- to 29-year-olds are the worst affected by unemployment. The unemployment rate among them reaches the record high 80%. 8% of the women in this age group are on maternity leave, most often unpaid, due to the fact that they have not worked even 7 days in order to be entitled to a paid maternity leave. Only 7% of the young Roma have a permanent job, and 6% have succeeded in finding a seasonal (temporary) job. In comparison - unemployed from the group of their "parents" (40-49 year-olds) reach 64%, 16% of them have a permanent job and 12% are engaged temporarily.

When we study the correlation between the duration of unemployment and the age of the respondents ( $K=0.346$ ), we find, again, that the youngest Roma have been the worst affected by the crisis. 62% of the young Roma individuals have never had a job (17- to 29-year-olds). This refers to only 2% of Roma at the ages between 30-59 years, 6% of those between 50 and 59 years (in both groups mostly handicapped and mothers of many children) and 25% of our respondents over the age of 60 years (mainly women).

Roma between the age of 40 and 49 years have the best position on the labor market in comparison with the other age groups. 16% of them have a permanent job; another 12% are engaged temporarily in seasonal agricultural activities, in the light industry or the construction industry sector. More private-held businesses can be found in this group than in the other age groups, although the owners tend to declare it very rarely - 8%. 13% of the people in this group receive a disability or incapacity pension, and the unemployed are 64%. As little as 4% of the 40- to 49-year-olds, mostly seriously ill people and disabled persons, have never had a job.

Our respondents' spouses have very similar to above data with significant differences based on gender ( $K=0.260$ ), age and place of residence. 54% of the interviewed women and 64% of the men (or 69%, including women on an unpaid maternity leave) declared that their spouses were unemployed. The number of men, who declared that their wives were pensioners, is higher than this of women. In a larger number of cases women declared that their husbands had permanent jobs in the state sector; very often - that they were hired at seasonal, temporary or casual jobs such as gathering scrap, mushrooms or herbs; and that their husbands ran small private business - various repair services providing insignificant and irregular income.

Unemployment has not affected the Roma from the different sub-groups equally. The highest rate of unemployment is among the "naked" Roma in the districts researched. The negative stereotypes Bulgarians have of them are the most fixed and steady. The percentage of the unemployed Roma on the different sites is as follows: 92% of the Roma in the village of Sotirya; 83% of the Roma in the village of Topolchane; 74% of the Roma in Nadezhda district in Sliven, where apart from "naked"



Roma there are also Roma from other groups. The “naked” Roma have started to participate in organized employment activities later as compared to the other groups, they have the poorest education and qualification status, they are least disciplined as employees. That is why they were among the first who became unemployed. In the village of Sotirya, for example, there is not a single Rom who has been laid off during the last four years. Mass unemployment hit this group 7-8 years ago and the last Wallachian Roma who had a job lost it 5 years ago. 37% of the Roma in the village have never worked. Very similar results are observed in the village of Topolchane.

The “Bulgarian” Gypsies in Nikola Kochev district in Sliven indisputably have the best position on the labor market. This Roma micro-community has integrated into the Bulgarian society to the greatest extent. Its members started working at the industrial enterprises in the town since their establishment, and have been building their good reputation as textile workers for a century and a half. Many medical doctors, teachers, musicians, lawyers, economists and human rights activists come from this community. All this is connected with the higher qualification of the people living there. Half of the respondents from Nikola Kochev district declared that they are qualified workers, or specialists. Nevertheless, only 26% of the respondents have a permanent job, half of them in the state enterprises. 16% of their spouses also have a permanent job. In 33% of the families at least one person has a permanent job. 12% run private business. Their better relations with Bulgarians, who were their colleagues at work until recently, their higher qualification and labor discipline make it easier for Roma from this group to find temporary or seasonal work. 43% of the households have some income from seasonal or occasional work, and 13% of the families depend entirely on this income. 1/3 of the Roma families in the “Jungle” gather their basic income by occasional work and another 1/3 - by gathering scrap, herbs or mushrooms. 26% are pensioners. Half of our respondents declared that were unemployed; however, these include temporary workers, part of the individuals with private business and part of the pensioners, who consider themselves still able to work. It is also necessary to mention that the considerably high share of unemployed in the district is mainly due to the big number of new-comers in the “Jungle”, who moved here from the Nadezhda ghetto.

The lowest unemployment rate is in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo (44%). The Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo were well accepted by the local population long ago. During the communist regime they were working in the local cooperative farm, their children were studying in the village school together with the children of the Bulgarians. The only difference between the way of life of the Roma and the Bulgarians in the village was the higher birth rate of the Roma families, but even this difference started to melt in 70s.

After the restitution of the agricultural land to the former owners the situation has changed. The Roma have never been landowners. That is why they couldn't become members of the new agricultural cooperatives. They could only be hired as agricultural workers. After the cooperative farms were shut down, the majority of rural Roma lost their permanent jobs. In 1994 a new cooperative was founded in Gorno Alexandrovo. At the present moment, most of the Roma are engaged in seasonal activities in the village or in the villages near the town of Yambol.

The poor management of the cooperative in the last two years led to the fact that only the Roma workers are paid for their work not in money but in agricultural goods. Part of them was dismissed. Nevertheless, most of the Roma in Gorno Alexandrovo still continue to work in the fields as workers in the newly established cooperative or as seasonal workers in neighboring villages. They grow vegetables and breed domestic animals in their yards for family consumption, too.

In the rest of the time many of them try to gain incomes through “suitcase trade”. A part of the men are engaged in gathering the olive harvest in Greece. Roma from Gorno Alexandrovo have the highest rates of labor migration compared to all the other groups included in the study. 42% of our respondents from the village declared that travel daily, weekly or at longer intervals in order to provide for their families’ living. The various forms of labor migration in Sliven were characteristic only for 16% of our respondents there.

However, 44% of the Roma in the village declared that they are unemployed (predominantly young men and women). This share is much bigger than the average unemployment for the country, but it is lower than those among the rest of the studied Roma communities. Almost 20% of the others are in maternity leave or pension. 15% work full time. 12% work in state institutions. None of the Roma in the village runs private company. 7% work in cooperatives - the highest percentage again.

Unemployment among husbands/wives is more or less the same. 30% of them are unemployed, 39% work full on part time. 23% have never worked - these are the young Roma in the village. Half of the unemployed was dismissed in the last 4 years. A quarter was dismissed in the last 5-10 years.

The reason for the mass dismissals of Gorno Alexandrovo Roma in the last 5 years (and not as everywhere else - in the last 5-10 years) is the fact the Roma did not work on a mass scale in Sliven, but in the state cooperatives (TKZS). Although the cooperatives were closed almost at the same time as factories, afterwards private or municipal cooperatives were opened. Overall financial crisis in the last 5 years led to deterioration of the financial situation of new cooperatives that did not allow them to open new working positions, but on the contrary - imposed closing of some of the old positions. During our second visit in the village in March 2000 we were informed about the beginning of a closing-down procedure for one of the two cooperatives. This means that orchards and vineyards, where Roma used to be hired as seasonal workers in the summer, will be returned to their ex-owners - Bulgarians. Therefore our Roma respondents were very worried about their employment prospects. Many of these owners live in the bigger towns and up until now they did not undertake any agricultural activities in the village. Those were done by the local cooperative. This new situation puts many questions about the future job opportunities of Roma in the village.

The data for employment and unemployment rates gathered during our fieldwork differ from the ones of the Regional Labor Office. The results from our interviews show higher share of registered unemployed as a result of the fact that 18% of our respondents declared that they did not register at the labor office for various reasons. The percentage of unregistered unemployed varies in the different Roma neighborhoods. It is the lowest in the Nadezhda district in Sliven - 12%, and in the same reaches 33% in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo. According to our Roma respondents from Gorno Alexandrovo there was no sense to register at the labor office, because in the last 10 years nobody from the local unemployed was offered a job and by a resolution of the municipal council they did not receive monthly social aids for unemployment. The share of registered unemployed in the rest of the villages is higher, because this is one of basic application requirements for children’s allowances and seasonal social aid for heating during the winter months.

There is a special social center in Nadezhda district, where social workers from the labor office and from the social assistance services help Roma fill the much too complicated forms, but also conduct regular checks at market places and construction sites in the town to verify the declared status of

those, who register as unemployed. In the same time according to the municipal council's policies monthly social aid shall be granted only in cases when both parents in the family are unemployed, because of the existing shortage of social assistance funds to cover the needs of all eligible individuals.

Many of the Roma haven't settled their labor documentation certifying that they were dismissed from work and this is why they were not officially registered as unemployed. Others, who in the previous years did not receive social aids, although they were following the Labor Office regulations, later decided that there was no point to do it any more and thus lost their statute of socially disadvantaged. Some of our respondents declared they have been long-term unemployed, although they have never been registered as such. This is the reason why their families cannot receive monthly social aids. These people feel deprived and discriminated and blame the social workers and the village mayors for their situation. However, if they themselves do not settle the necessary formalities, there would be no difference if someone else takes the position of the mayor after the forthcoming elections.

The present study confirmed the hypothesis that the processes of impoverishment of rural Roma population are deeper in the villages closer to bigger towns. Roma from those villages were integrated in the social networks of the big town. As the economic crisis deepened the unemployment in those satellite villages grew higher. Roma are least able to make their living from agricultural work for a number of reasons. Firstly, most of the agricultural plots of land near bigger towns have been bought by the citizens and developed as villa zones. Municipalities do not have enough agricultural land which they could rent to landless Roma, not to mention fact that up until recently the land in the villa zones was considerably more expensive. Secondly, in most of the cases Roma had worked in the nearby town factories, they do not have traditions in agriculture. Rural Roma often do not cultivate even the small gardens in front of their houses which can hardly be observed among their fellow-villagers even if the latter are old and sick. In the 60s the communist authorities established a practice of interning marginalized Roma families into satellite villages without taking any efforts for their re-integration into the local communities. The marginalization processes in those Roma communities deepened in the last few years. Their relations with the surrounding Bulgarian population grew tense. As a result of this Bulgarians often refuse to hire Roma as seasonal workers in their farms.

## 5. Historical findings

### Roma in Bulgaria

The history of Roma presence in Bulgaria has not been studied very well yet. Some prominent West European experts on Roma issues among who A. Fraser, D. Kenrick, G. Puxon, D. Crowe and many Roma intellectuals in Bulgaria consider the 1378 *Rila Award of Tzar Ivan Shishman* the first written evidence for Roma presence in Bulgaria (Fraser 1992; Kenrick, Puxon 1972, Crowe 1994). This hypothesis is based on a rather loose interpretation of an unclear paragraph containing the phrase “Agoupovi kleti”. (*One of the interpretations of the latter could be “poor Agoupts” – translator’s note*). However, most of the Bulgarian experts on Roma issues interpret this as a name of a location where temporary shepherds’ dwellings were built (Marushiakova, Popov 1993)

There is a widely spread hypothesis of mass Roma presence in Bulgaria as early as in the XIII c., which does not exclude the possibility of earlier settlements of separate smaller Roma groups. Although indirect, the arguments in support of this hypothesis sound convincing. Roma entered in the Byzantine Empire as early as the XI c., and in the XIII c. they have already settled in Macedonia, Serbia, Wallachia, Moldova and other Balkan countries. It is not logical to assume that they have not passed through Bulgarian land despite of the lack reliable written sources about this. In the XII c. there must have been a significant number of Roma in Byzantium because the Byzantine canonist Theodore Balsamon twice tried to focus the attention of the clergy and the laity to Gypsies aiming to restrict the contacts between the local Christian population and the newcomers. In canon LXI of the Council in Trullo he threatened every Christian who was making their living by fortune-telling or using wild animals, bears and snakes, for public entertainment with a six-year excommunication from the church. In canon LXV of the Council in Trullo he stigmatized those activities as Satanic and the Gypsies who practiced them - as false prophets. A century later the Constantinople Patriarch Athanasius I sent a circular to the clergy containing instructions for them to teach their congregation to avoid contacts with fortunetellers, bear-tamers and snake-charmers and “especially not to allow Gypsies (Adinganous) to enter their homes because they would teach them diabolical things” (G. Soulis 1961). Several centuries later in his treatise on the reasons for the misfortune of the Byzantium Empire Joseph Bryennius mentions that among those reasons were people’s contacts with magicians, fortunetellers and Gypsies. In the XV c. another Byzantine canon, translated into Old Slavonic, prescribed a five-year excommunication from the church of those who sought advice from Gypsy fortunetellers about the future or invite sorcerers in their homes to cure sick family members or to solve a family problem by magic.

The Eastern Orthodox Church left its mark on all aspects of the cultural life of Christians on the Balkans in the Middle Ages. The old Bulgarian literature, which initially served the practical liturgy needs and the propaganda of Christian religion, as early as in the IX c. adopted religious character which was preserved by the middle of the XVIII c. – the period of the Bulgarian Renaissance. The swordplay between the pagan and the Christian ideology had a significant place in this literature. The church fought irreconcilably against the remains of pagan beliefs, preserved in the folklore, customs and traditional practices of the local population for coping with various troubles – sicknesses, calamities, poor harvest, remedy for love misfortune, etc. and naturally directed their anger against Roma who practiced all those activities forbidden by the canon. Even in the religious and didactic literature of the XVIII c. and XIX c., produced in the Bulgarian monasteries, the issue

of the sinfulness of being a fortuneteller, a sorcerer or a vagabond became more and more popular and those activities were more and more associated with Roma women.

Another indirect evidence for significant presence of Gypsies in Bulgaria even before the Ottoman conquest can be found in the Ottoman archives. The Ottoman tax registers from the first decades after the conquest of Bulgaria mentioned the existence of Gypsy population in the country specifying the number of Gypsy households and the amount of taxes which they paid to the Empire. It has to be pointed out that the biggest number of Roma households in the newly conquered Balkan land lived on the present territory of Bulgaria. Another very important evidence is the fact from the XV c. to the XVII c. the majority of Roma listed in the Ottoman register are Christians with Slavic names. This means that for a long time they have been in permanent close contacts with the local population, that they have adopted its religion and name system and spoke its language.

The first document from the Ottoman period which registered a significant number of Roma population on Bulgarian land is the Timar Register of the Nikopol sandzhak (district), which dates back to around 1430. It contains data about 431 Roma households or 3.5 % of those listed in the Register. The number of the settled ones cannot not be precisely estimated, however, as early as the XV c. the village of Dabizhiv, registered in the Sofia region, consisted of 18 Gypsy families, 3 of them of widowed women.

In a tax register of the Roumelian population from 1475 there is an entry that both Christian and Muslim Roma paid 13 *akcheta* (unit of payment) *harach* per year. A tax waiver was applied only to the Gypsies living in the fortresses and serving the Ottoman army.

Another Ottoman register from 1487-89 provides data about Christian Roma households which paid *dzhizie* (25 *akcheta* per year) and additional taxes – *ispenche* and blood money.

New Gypsy groups came to the Balkans together with the Ottomans and a significant number of them adopted the Islam even before they moved to Europe. Part of them served the conquerors' army, mainly as craftsmen, cooks and musicians. Others simply joined the conquerors in a search of better living conditions.

In the XVI c. there appeared the first laws related to Gypsies on Bulgarian land in particular. In 1530 sultan Suleiman the Magnificent issued *Law on the Gypsies Living in Roumelia Vilayet* and in 1541 another law was passed for the governor of the Gypsy sandzhak (district). Those laws regulated tax collection for Roma and banned the co-existence and joint traveling of Muslim and Christian Roma (Galabov 1961).

The available sources give scholars reasons to believe that a great part of Gypsies on the Balkans under the Ottoman rule have been settled or at least had permanent dwellings as early as in the XVI c. They were engaged in various crafts but those who served the army (as general construction workers, porters, cooks, musicians, craftsmen, etc.) benefited from the greatest tax privileges. At the same time a significant part of Roma made their living by agricultural work, mainly as seasonal workers (land cultivation, mowing, gathering crops). The settled way of life of Roma intensified their everyday relations with the local population, led to cultural exchange and made their way of living similar to that of the local people – a prerequisite for their better acceptance and gradual integration into the Bulgarian society.

There were much more conflicts in the relations between the local population and Roma nomad refugees coming from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, from Wallachia and Moldova and from the war devastated territories of the Ottoman Empire. Those groups of travelers were less inclined to comply with the norms of living of the local population. They often committed crimes - stealing domestic animals, agricultural produce and other private property - which were imputed to the local settled Roma. The negative attitude towards Roma travelers and the rejection of their culture (which apart from everything else was also very unfamiliar to the settled peoples) set its mark on the establishment of a mixed and full of negative characteristics image of Gypsies as a whole.

Since XVIII the share of Muslim Gypsies on the Balkans has started to exceed that of Christian Gypsies. The social privileges for Muslims on the territory of the Ottoman Empire are among the basic reasons for this change of religion. Tax registers from this period show that Roma women most often had Christian and Roma men - Muslim names. With the adoption of Islam and change in the names into Muslim men, who were in much closer contact with authorities, had better job opportunities and paid lower taxes. Women in the Ottoman Empire paid taxes only if they were widows - heads of families, and, as it was already mentioned above, when they practiced prostitution - in some rare cases related to particular Roma groups in the bigger towns with army garrisons. Therefore there was less economic and social pressure on Roma women to change their religion and names.

The fact that the majority of Roma in the Ottoman Empire adopted the Islam created another type of resistance against them on part of the Christian Bulgarian population. This resistance became more explicit in the period of national consolidation of Bulgarians and their struggle for national liberation.

Ottomans treated Roma with suspicion notwithstanding of their religion. This was due to their firm belief that Roma did not follow strictly both the religious instructions and the state regulations. Legal documents from Bitolya show that Muslim Roma were required to prove their strict observation of Islam norms and rituals in order to be exempted from the *dzhizie* tax. Some authorities' orders of that time explicitly say that Roma are unwanted as army servants - even in the transport units. Muslim Roma have not been recruited in the Ottoman army since XVIII with the beginning of its transformation of into a conscript one up until 1874. They were not allowed to become clergymen and sometimes even to vote for Muslim clerics. That is why in many cases their status was similar to this of the Christian rayah.

Despite of the above mentioned restrictions the situation of Roma in the Ottoman Empire was incomparably better than this of Roma in Western and Central Europe, who have been systematically subjected to persecution, annihilation and assimilation. It was sharply different from the semi-slavish statute of Roma in Wallachia and Moldova, which was preserved up until the mid 60s of the XIX c. This made it possible for a significant part of Roma on Bulgarian land to preserve their language, culture and traditions. This was also the reason why the Ottoman Empire became a center of attraction for many Roma refugees coming from other parts of Europe and one of the explanations for their high percentage on the Balkans.

The centuries-long coexistence of Bulgarians and Roma within the Ottoman Empire, where the two ethnic groups were treated in a similar way, led to the development of a flexible system of

regulations of their social contacts in the sphere of neighborly relations and reduced possibilities for destructive conflicts. This was also due to the successful adaptation of Roma to the economic life of the Balkans in the Middle Ages. The Ottoman tax registers show that Roma practiced various crafts, serving agriculture, domestic textile and food production, public cleaning, etc. The local non-Roma population widely used these services. Part of the Roma were hired as low-paid seasonal workers agricultural farms and construction works.

Roma played a significant role in the festival activities of the various ethnic communities on the Balkans. Despite the attempts of the Christian church to oppose the pagan beliefs and practices, the latter were widely spread among the rural population. Magic rituals for health of newly babies in families, which already had cases of children's death, or for health of delicate children required the special element of the ax-talisman, that could be made only by a Gypsy iron-monger. The mass infant mortality in the traditional communities gives us reasons to believe that such services had been widely used and explain the high reputation of the Gypsy iron-mongers in those communities. Another ritual required that iron tongs made by a Gypsy should be put in the coffin of the death person to prevent him/her from becoming vampire. (Popov, 1993). The young Gypsy women had a special role in the magic ritual for bringing rain "Butterfly". We can hardly underestimate their role having in mind the agrarian character of the traditional Balkan communities, preserved up until the middle of the XX c., and their poor use of irrigation systems. Gypsies had a very important role in carnivals. Many of them were skillful musicians, traveling actors and animal-trainers. It should be pointed out that festivals and carnivals were of an extreme importance in the traditional Bulgarian society.

Roma also had other important social functions. Because of their mobility they were often used to disseminate information. Roma were also invited to conduct funeral rites. There were Roma highly respected for their skills as healers, sorcerers and herbalists.

Gypsies gradually began to be seen as mediums in contact with the "other world". Both Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria were convinced that giving something to a Gypsy is a pious thing to do, and improves the "giver's" situation in the hereafter. Gypsies inevitably received ritual gifts of food "for God's forgiveness" on days which mark respect for the dead, e.g. All Souls' Day, "Ashure", funerals, memorials, the ritual honoring of the dead by distributing the first fruit of the year, the first loaf, etc. These beliefs are still preserved today among the Bulgarian Muslims and Bulgarian Turks, as well as in many Christian Bulgarian villages, especially in mountain and hill regions where the traditional way of life is better preserved. (Tomova, 1998)

This is how Gypsies (especially the settled and semi-settled ones) have been harmoniously integrated into the economic life and the system of rituals of the traditional Bulgarian society. Gypsies, on their turn, also adopted whole layers of the national culture of various ethnic communities they mixed with in the course of centuries. Even nowadays Roma in part of the Balkan countries have preserved traditional customs of Bulgarians, Wallachians, Macedonians, Serbs, etc., in their original forms. Some of the best folk musicians and singers on the Balkans are often Roma.

In the period of the Bulgarian national consciousness formation the attitude towards "the others", including Gypsies, sharply changed. However, it is true that Roma have never been considered an immediate threat for the development of the Bulgarian nation. At the same time the fact that the majority of them were Muslims associated them with the "natural enemies" and increased the

suspicious and the negative attitude towards them. During the struggle for national liberation from the Ottoman rule in 1876 there were acts of violence against Muslim Roma ranging from involuntary change of religion to murder. Although these acts did not have a mass character they indicated the rising ethnocentrism and extreme nationalism in crucial moments during the Bulgarian Renaissance.

Regarding the Roma as completely unequal, inferior, second-rate human beings is a more characteristic aspect of the change in attitude during the period of the Bulgarian national consciousness formation and had long lasting consequences. This can be attributed to various factors. In XVIII c. and XIX c. Roma were visibly lagging behind in their social, educational and cultural status compared to Bulgarians. On the other hand, the other Balkan nations achieved political autonomy or complete independence from the Ottoman Empire and became more advanced in their socio-economic and cultural development which increased the inferiority complex of Bulgarians. They had a sharp although unconscious need to compare themselves and ascribe their negative traits to inferior ethnic groups. This inferior ethnic group was the Roma.

### **Roma in the Third Bulgarian Kingdom (1878-1944)**

After the liberation, the process of integration of Roma into the Bulgarian society continued at different speed and was surrounded by ambiguity. There were attempts of an involuntary change of religious affiliation of a part of the Muslim Roma which were successful in the towns. Due to the socio-economic changes in the country Roma were much more inclined to settle down permanently, to get involved in agriculture and to change some of their former traditional crafts. Development of capitalism in Bulgaria and the narrowing of the national markets after Bulgaria was left outside the enormous Ottoman Empire led to a deep crisis in small private enterprise. This affected Roma too. As a result the share of low-paid Roma factory workers increased. In Sliven, for example, as early as the middle of XIX c., a significant part of the textile workers were recruited among Roma. (Tabakov 1911). Many Roma worked in the brickyards, as well as in the tobacco processing industry, the construction industry, and the road and railroad building. There was an increase in the average share of literate Roma, especially of young men living among Christian Bulgarians.

The slow changes in the economic life in Bulgaria and its agrarian character preconditioned the preservation of the traditional way of life as well as many of the traditional Roma crafts including various services for the poor rural population (Marinov 1962). Although the market of craft services shrank as a result of the developing industry a significant part Roma continued to make their living as blacksmiths, ferriers, tinsmiths, carpenters, potters, woodworking tool makers, basket-makers, horsedealers, wooden bowl makers, ironmongers, sieve-makers, slaughterers, barbers, bone handle makers, construction and agricultural workers and stock-breeders. Roma musicians and carnival artists (bear trainers, dancers, puppeteers, etc.) kept their social status in the Bulgarian society and part of the most prominent musicians participated in the newly-formed town and military brass bands.

The first Gypsy choirs and amateur theater groups came to life after World War I. The community cultural clubs in Sofia, Sliven, Shoumen, Varna, Lom, etc. became very active in the 20s and the 30s. In 1919 Bulgarian Gypsies found their own organization named Egypt, which was banned in 1925 after the supplement to the State Security Act.

In 1929 a new Roma organization, *Istikbal (Future)* Muslim National Organization for Education and Culture was established in Sofia; it started publishing the *Terbie (Education)* newspaper in 1933,



the first and only periodical issued by Roma from the time of their settlement on Bulgarian land up until 1946 (Crowe 1994, Maroushiakova and Popov 1993). This organization was banned after the coup d'état on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 1934.

Immediately after the liberation the Bulgarian political parties also directed their attention towards Roma who according to data from the censuses in this period comprised about 2,5% of the Bulgarian population. There are serious studies on the activities of the left-wing socialists and the communists among the textile workers in Sliven (Genov and others, 1961). There are also many examples of pre-election manipulation of the Gypsy population (mainly on part of the governing parties) and involvement of its representatives in criminal acts during pre-election campaigns in the last decade of the XIX c. As a result of this the Bill for the Amendment to the Elections Act was passed in May 1901 which deprived non-Christian Roma as well as those who did not have permanent residence of election rights. It has to be pointed out that during the parliamentary debate against this discriminatory amendment to the Election Act there were only two Members of Parliament, Ianko Zabounov of the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union and Todor Vlaikov of the Democratic Party who took the floor. Another Members of Parliament, Dimitar Petkov, also admitted that the above Bill for the Amendment to the Elections Act was in contradiction with the Bulgarian constitution. However, the act was passed by huge majority and was effective until 1908 (Stenographic records, 1901).

In 1940 Roma in Bulgaria were banned to visit the central area of the Bulgarian capital and the major cities and towns as well as to use city transport. Their food rations were severely restricted compared to those of the rest of the Bulgarian population. They were even smaller than the food rations for Jews, who were subject to a special discriminative government policy. Part of the Roma from Sofia and the bigger towns were sent to labor camps together with Jews. Nevertheless Bulgaria was an ally with the nazi Germany it did not allow its Jewish and Gypsy citizens to be deported to concentration camps or annihilated due to their ethnic origin.

During our work in the Regional Historical Archive in Sliven the research team found two interesting documents from 1942: file-card 46 k., archive unit 41, page 33, page 51. These documents refer to the review of petition from "a group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies" to the municipal council in Sliven, which was entered into the archive under incoming number 26757/1942 but which we could not find in the archives. The text of the two documents is as follows:

*File-card 46 k., archive unit 41, page 33*

Review of petition from a group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies

*Reviewing the petition under incoming No. 26757/1942 by which a group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies ask to change their nationality to Bulgarian in their family records and identity cards in order not to be deprived of children's allowances, rations from the commissariat, etc.*

*Not finding any grounds to grant the above petition the enforced administration concluded as follows:*

The above petition should be submitted for consideration to the whole municipal council.

*The session was closed at 17:00 h.*

*Mayor: (illegible signature)*

*Assistants: 1. (illegible signature)*

*2. (illegible signature)*

*Councilors 1. (illegible signature)*

*2. (illegible signature)*

*File-card 46 k., archive unit 41, page 51:*

#### Review of petition from a group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies

*Reviewing the petition by which a group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies ask to change their nationality to Bulgarian in their family records and identity cards in order not to be deprived of children's allowances paid by the Social Security Fund, rations from the commissariat, etc.*

*Councilor Georgi Bodourov suggested a commission to be appointed, which should review the special list of 150 Bulgarian Gypsies that differ significantly from the so-called "naked" Gypsies, "gornenski" Gypsies, etc., so that at least they were accepted and registered as Bulgarians.*

*After discussions, considering the character of the petition and the fact that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labor has reviewed and has not granted the petition, the Council concluded as follows:*

*The Council believes that it cannot make resolution on the above petition by the group of Bulgarian citizens from Sliven - Bulgarian Gypsies and cannot grant their request.*

#### **Roma in Bulgaria during the period of the communist rule (1944-1989)**

The political changes in the middle of the 40s had an ambiguous impact upon the minority communities in Bulgaria. Under the influence of the international tendencies with respect to human rights and following the example of the Soviet Union at first Roma obtained wide opportunities for development of their own culture and were declared equal to the rest of the population in all aspects of social life. Serious efforts were made for the improvement of their level of education and qualification. Favorable conditions were created for the decrease of unemployment in the Roma community. The share of Roma employed in the agricultural cooperatives, the state-owned farms and the industrial enterprises increased. The socio-economic status and living conditions of Roma gradually improved. In March 1945 the Joint Roma Organization for Fight Against Fascism and Racism and Cultural Development of the Roma Minority was established, which found many local branches in various parts of the country. The Roma Gypsy Theater was established in 1947. Priority was given to artistic and sports activities.

In the mid-50s, under the influence of the events in the Soviet Union the government policy towards Roma radically changed. This was the beginning of a process of systematic cultural assimilation of Roma "into the Bulgarian socialist nation". All local Roma organizations were closed down and their

activities were transferred to the district Fatherland Front organizations. The *Roma* Theater was closed. The chairman of the Joint Gypsy Organization, Shakir Pashov, Member of Parliament and Editor-in-Chief of the first Roma newspapers in the country, *Istikbal* and *Romano essi* was pronounced a police informer in the period before September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and sent to the labor camp in Belene.

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1956 the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued Decree No. 685 “*О приобщении к труду цыган, занимающихся бродяжничеством*”. It was followed by Decree No. 1216 of the Council of Ministers of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria as of October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1957 on “Resolution of the Issue of the Gypsy Minority in Bulgaria” and by Decree No. 258 as of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1958 on *Resolution of the Issues of the Gypsy Population in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria* (Announcement of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, 1958). These decrees regulate the settlement, education and employment of Bulgarian Roma, ban “the migration and beggary”, provide for the allocation of funds for building homes for the newly settled Roma households and recommend their employment in afforestation. The propaganda leaflet of the National Council of the Fatherland Front *The Gypsy Population of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria on the Way to Socialism* from 1964 written by D. Genov, V. Marinov I T. Tahirov points out that in the period 1958-1964 14000 new homes for Gypsies were built which provided shelter to 75000 individuals or one-third of the Gypsies in Bulgaria. To this purpose the Bulgarian Investment Bank was obliged to grant loans to Roma home building to the amount of 500 levs. The executive committees at the people’s councils were obliged to allocate free of charge sites to the former travelers or to Gypsies involuntary relocated from other places who were permanently employed in the region of the respective council and the councils were to build the infrastructure for the new residents.

In 1960 the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party once again reviewed the housing problems of Roma and issued a directive not to allow for the segregation of Gypsies in new isolated neighborhoods and to liquidate gradually the existing ones by mixing the Bulgarian and the Roma population in the newly-built suburbs. According to data from the 1980 representative sociological survey ordered by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party *The Establishment of the Socialist Way of Life Among the Bulgarian Citizens of Gypsy Origin* 49% of the urban Roma population continue to inhabit isolated neighborhoods The survey indicated that Roma homes were comparatively small and overpopulated, and hardly 17% of the Roma households had sewerage at home, 13% of the houses had a bathroom, 6% had a toilet inside the house and 5% - a permanent hot water supply. In about a half of the Roma families children had separate beds and the children of 10% of the families slept on the floor.

The Decree No. 258 and the following instructions of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and decrees of the Council of Ministers provide special regulations for the employment of Roma travelers or of those, who did not have permanent jobs. In the period between 1958 and 1964 the state provided jobs to about 50 000 Roma, 90% of who were engaged as permanent workers in the agricultural cooperatives and in the state-owned farms, as well as in various factories, industrial enterprises, mines and forestry enterprises. The regional people’s councils, the municipal councils and all public organizations were involved in the process “changing the attitude of Roma towards labor”. They were obliged to keep records of the number of “former Roma nomads” who became permanent residents of their particular regions, to conduct regular checks of the labor conditions of Roma, to take measures for their qualification and keeping at work “decisively stopping any attempts of Roma to go back to nomadic life”.

The representative sociological surveys conducted in this period - *Study of the town and the village* in 1968 directed by Prof. Zh. Oshakov and *Establishment of the Socialist Way of Life ...* in 1980 - provide interesting data about the employment dynamics of the Roma community. The comparative results show that in the period between 1968 and 1980 there was a serious increase in the employment rates of Roma women. In 1968 the percentage of permanent Roma workers was 64% for the men against 36% for the women, while in 1980 this ratio became 58:41. According to data from the 1980 survey almost 84% of the Roma between the ages of 16 and 60 years “were registered as permanent workers in one or another labor organization” (which practically means that part of the women used their legal right to paid maternity leave for taking care of the child until it reaches the age of 3 years, granted if the woman worked for the minimum of 7 days during her pregnancy) and 88% of the Roma men had permanent jobs.

There have been particular changes in the distribution of Roma in the various economic branches, as follows:

**Table 9**

**Distribution of Roma with permanent jobs by years of survey and economic branches (%)**

<b>Economic branch</b>	<b>1968</b>	<b>1980</b>
Industry	12.0	26.7
Agricultural and forestry enterprises	32.5	26.6
Construction	5.0	6.3
Commerce	0.7	3.4
Other production branches	3.2	2.6
Science, scientific attendance and arts	0.6	0.4
Health and social services	0.4	0.8
Education	0.4	0.7
Others	4.3	4.9

The 1980 survey also showed that more than half of the employed Roma were unskilled or low qualified workers under poor labor conditions. “Nearly 33% of the Roma work in normal conditions; 31% of them work in the open; another 0.5% - at poor electric light; 6% - under loud noise; 2% work in narrow and stuffy premises; another 3% of the Roma work under high or low temperature; 8% of them - in conditions of dust, smoke or humidity; 3.5% - under miasmata and 0.5% - underground.” In 1980, the year of the above survey, 89% of the Roma in Bulgaria were not involved in any forms of qualification improvement, 8% attended various out-of-work qualification courses and 1% - attended qualification courses against a paid-leave.

According to the survey in the last three months of the period when it was conducted many of the respondents made various breaches of the labor discipline. 10% of them refused to fulfill their duties within the required terms; 44% came late to work; 33% left work before the end working time and without their chiefs’ permission; 14% did not go to work for 1-2 days in per month without any valid reasons; 32% left their place of work for an hour or more with a permission

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1962 the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party passed Resolution A 101 aiming “to stop all negative tendencies among Bulgarian Muslims, Gypsies and Tatars towards Turkish identification and to strengthen their patriotic education”. Along with

this the Resolution recommended that the Ministry of Justice together with the People's Councils Department at the Council of Ministers should start the preparation of instructions for implementation of article 16 of the Regulations for Keeping the Vital Statistics Records, in order to "explain citizens of non-Bulgarian origin that at inner conviction and expressing openly their will they can register themselves and their children as Bulgarians and change their personal, father's and family names without the necessity for resolution from the People's Court, but only by a written application to the particular People's Council". The Resolution also provided for "wide and systematic explanatory work accompanying the implementation of these instructions". Pressure was exerted upon Muslim Roma to change their name into Christian and to form Bulgarian ethnic self-identity. The very word "Gypsy" started to be considered derogatory and offending and Roma were allowed to put on trial those, who "offended them" with the name "Gypsy". The communist party and the dependent media stopped even mentioning about Gypsies, as if they have really disappeared from the country. Special measures were taken to prevent Bulgarian Muslims, Muslim Gypsies and Tatars to send their children to schools where Turkish language was taught. The state provided additional funds for kindergartens to accept a bigger number of minority children and for the establishment of a wider network of school boarding houses in regions with minority population. These measures aimed to create better conditions for minority children to learn the official language (Bulgarian), to grow apart from the "conservative influence of the family environment" and to improve their education in general.

Our work in the civic archives in the villages of Gorno Alexandrovo, Sotirya and Topolchane showed that the campaign in those villages for replacement of the Turkish-Arabic names of the Muslim Gypsies with Bulgarian ones was conducted before the promulgation of this Resolution - as early as the spring and the summer of 1960, after the mass "voluntary" filing of petitions for change of names with the People's Council. The civic registers in the village of Gorno Alexandrovo expressly indicate that the change of the names and nationality of the Muslim Gypsies was made by virtue of the Amendment to paragraphs 16 and 56 of the Regulations for Keeping the Vital Statistics Records (Annals of the village of Gorno Alexandrovo, issue 2,18 from 1960). This means that the Resolution was first approbated in separate regions before its official announcement and implementation.

In this period the tendency increased among Roma to identify themselves as non-Roma, but as Turks, Bulgarians or Wallachians. Apart from the assimilation pressure upon them on part of the communist party the low social status of Roma was yet another important reason for their willingness to deny their group identity and to replace it by a "more prestigious" one. Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, on their part, refused to accept Roma as part of their own communities. Only part of highly educated and qualified Roma and their families successfully integrated into the above "prestigious" ethnic groups.

During our work in the Regional Historical Archives in Sliven we came across interesting documents about *The State of Education of Roma Students in Sliven* for the period between 1962 and 1965, included in file-card No. 616, list 1, archive unit 227, page 11. This information from 1962 remained unupdated and was considered valid for several years without anybody paying attention to this fact. It was in 1965 only that some corrections in the number of Roma students were entered. The content of the above document is as follows:

**I N F O R M A T I O N**  
**ABOUT THE STATE OF EDUCATION OF ROMA STUDENTS IN SLIVEN**

*The number of Roma students in the districts Dame Gruev (later renamed to Nadezhda - I. T.), Georgy Kirkov (now Nikola Kochev - I. T.) and Novo Selo is 1417 and the total number of Roma students in the whole town is 2000. This data indicates that the number of Roma students in our town is extremely high. 860 of those students study at Bratya Miladinovi School, 336 - at No. 1 Elementary School and the rest - at Panayot Hitov School.*

*Observations about the state of education in each of the above three schools show the following:*

*The number of pupils who were enrolled in the first grade at Panayot Hitov School in 1957/1958 school year counted ten. Up until now only 10% of them passed successfully in the upper grades, 12.5% - repeated one of the grades, 50% repeated two of the grades and 25% - three of the grades.*

*At the No. 1 Elementary School hardly 55 pupils from the primary and secondary level pass successfully each school year. 236 pupils repeated each class once or more times. For example, Georgi Stefanov Dimitrov, born in 1946, repeated first grade six times, Krastyo Nedev Ivanov, born in 1947, repeated first grade eight times, Ivan Enchev Dondoukov, born in 1949, repeated first grade six times. The analysis of the graduation rate for the 1958/59 school year shows as follows: 50 pupils were enrolled in first grade, 20 of them passed in second grade, 17 passed in third grade and only 15 finished successfully fourth and enrolled in fifth grade during the current school year.*

*The number of pupils who were enrolled in the first grade at Bratya Miladinovi School in 1954/1955 school year counted 104. 18 of them successfully finished fourth grade and only 2 finished seventh grade without repeating any grade. The number of pupils who were enrolled in the first grade in 1953/1954 school year was 151. 26 successfully finished fourth grade and only 3 - seventh grade.*

*This data shows that the number of pupils who finish school without repeating a school grade is extremely small. Almost all of the primary (fourth grade) and elementary graduates (seventh grade) repeated one, two, three or more years of study. There are only few pupils who graduated seventh and eighth grade. There are no secondary school graduates in Dame Gruev district.*

*What are the reasons? Almost all Roma pupils live under extremely poor conditions. Most of the Roma families have many children and live in one-room dwellings. For example, the family of one of the pupils - Ashime Ibriyamova has six members who share one room with earthen floor near the horse-stable. The six-member family of another pupil - Georgi Stoyanov Georgiev is extremely poor; it shares one room and all the children are poorly dressed. The situation is much worse in the family of Todor Iliev Ouroumov who lives under poor conditions together with his deaf-mute sister and two siblings who are mentally retarded. The nine-member family of Gancho Nikolov Peev also shares one single room. The household conditions in many of the families are extremely poor. Many of them do not even have a table and a chair. Pupils from such families come to school unprepared, without*

*homework, notebooks, pencils, etc. This is most frequently observed among the first graders. Many of the Roma pupils do not attend school classes regularly and are absent from school without a valid reason or often leave class without the teacher's permission.*

*Most of the Roma pupils are very poorly dressed, wearing shaggy and dirty clothes. Parents, on their part, do not show any interest in the education of their own children. In Dame Gruev district, for example, about 35 parents drink alcohol systematically and drive their children away on the street where they often join gangs and get involved in antisocial acts. Shtilian Apostolov, for example, drinks in the company of his son Sava, a pupil in the fourth grade. There are 28 children registered at the Center for Work with Juvenile Delinquents and more than 60 who are morally threatened, i.e. children living under extremely poor conditions with the serious risk to their moral behavior. There is a list of children who permanently commit illegal acts: Yumine Yuseinova, Yordan Kourtev, Yashar Mehmedaliev and others from the Dame Gruev district and Petko Terzobaliev, Dimitar Dimitrov and others from Georgi Kirkov district. The systematic thefts of the above listed give reasons to consider them criminals. Many of these children come from single-member families and they change their place of residence either with the mother or with the father.*

*There is a tendency among Roma living in the Dame Gruev and Georgi Kirkov districts towards early marriages. There are 8 such marriages in No. 1 Elementary School and over 10 in Bratya Miladinovi School. Most of these children's parents do not have permanent jobs and are involved in peddling or idle away their time doing nothing which has a negative impact on their children who lose enthusiasm to study and work.*

*Obviously this way of life has an adverse effect on the education of Roma children. The family does not make any efforts to help their children develop any hygiene, cultural or labor habits. As a result of this the efforts of the teachers at school in this respect are foiled under the influence of the street and the family.*

*Regarding the above*

#### **WE SUGGEST THAT**

- 1. A school boarding house should be opened for at least 200 children of large families, dissolved marriages, orphans or children with one parent.*
- 2. Free of charge meals should be provided to the rest of the pupils at No. 1 and No. 6 schools which would guarantee pupils' full-time stay at school (for one full day).*
- 3. Every possible measure should be taken for the desegregation of the compact Roma schools by dispersing their pupils in the rest of the town schools and in other schools in the region.*
- 4. The Decree on Involuntary Relocation should be applied to some parents from this minority group who live a parasitic life and do not let their children go to school.*

*1965 г.*

*In the town of Sliven the number of Roma children subject to obligatory education is 1604. In the current school year only 4 of them have not been enrolled due to absence from the town or due to marriage.*

*The percentage of Roma students who graduate from elementary school (who complete eight grade) has not yet increased to the desired level. It is just in the last few years that the number of students who completed eighth grade increased (about 40-50 students).*

*A very small number of students, less than 20, continued their education at the town technical or vocational schools, such as the vocational schools of wood working and public catering, the technical school of textile, the medical school, etc.*

*There are 6 Roma teachers in the schools in the town of Sliven.*

*About 200 Roma citizens of the adult Roma population in Sliven have become illiterate or semi-illiterate due to lack of practice of their reading and writing skills although every year about 150 illiterate Roma attend literacy courses.*

*A school boarding house was opened in Sliven for the improvement of Roma children's learning skills. It enrolls 60 children. The town people's council periodically provides financial aid to the Roma pupils.*

**INFORMATION**  
**about the boarding house for Roma pupils opened at the Bratya Miladinovi Elementary School in Sliven**

*The boarding house at the Bratya Miladinovi Elementary School was opened on ..... It has 3 rooms accommodating 30 pupils. The pharmacy room is moved to another place and this space will be used for the accommodation of another 15 pupils. This means that at the end of January the boarding house can enroll about 45-50 children.*

*At first the boarding house was intended for 60 children but due to incidental expenses for furniture and equipment the number of beds had to be cut down. For example, according to the plans 14 beds should have been placed in each room but it turned out that no more than 12 could be placed because extra space was needed for a heating stove, a wardrobe, a shelf. etc.*

*Furthermore, additional premises are needed for an infirmary with 1-2 beds, a room for the boarding house teachers, a bathroom, a pantry, a study room, etc. The only way these premises can be provided is by decreasing the number of beds. Currently the above mentioned premises for the teachers, a study room and an infirmary are in process of preparation. The bathroom is not yet ready. For the time being the children wash themselves by tap water in the cellar of the school, which is far from the bedrooms and is very uncomfortable with a high-placed sink, also used for washing the dishes.*

*The number of children could be increased only at the expense of the three shifts in the school, which we do not approve of because presently both the kindergarten and extra classes are conducted in the same building and the mixing of the different curricula hampers the school classes.*

*The meals are not served at the fixed hours to all pupils due to their different shifts.*

*Regarding furniture and equipment. Sufficient amount of funds was provided for maintenance and equipment of the rooms with mattresses, bed linen, etc. The boarding house management already*



*bought the necessary equipment apart from a few items among which buckets, tubs, wash basins, demijohns, jars, etc.*

*There is shortage of clothes, underwear, toilet articles, textbooks, etc. The children's outer appearance and the interior of the premises are still unsatisfactory which means that the boarding house teachers and the housekeeper do not perform their duties as required.*

*The kitchen and the dining room meet the standards and can provide services to 100 children. Currently separate premises are prepared for washing the dishes and storing food.*

*There is still room for improvement of the boarding house conditions and management so that they fully meet the state requirements.*

*According to us this is due to the following main two reasons:*

- 1. A significant amount of funds has been granted but the time for preparatory activities was not enough. What is more, there was pressure for the boarding house to be opened as early as possible without taking into account the lack of necessary conditions. So, in fact the provision of the equipment started after the boarding house was opened.*
- 2. Due to the very same reason the selection of the personnel - the teachers and a housekeeper - who are 90% responsible for the successful operation of the boarding house, was not perfect. The lack of experience and the lack of clear regulations for the management of boarding houses in general attribute to the underestimation of many questions related to the premises equipment and the educational process. In order to clarify those questions our department held a meeting with the personnel of the boarding house and with teachers whose pupils are accommodated at the boarding house.*

*Regarding the boarding house teachers' performance: For the time being there are two teachers at the boarding house: one licensed primary school teacher and one licensed kindergarten teacher. They work under comparatively well prepared curricula. However, their work shows that they still have a lot to learn in some respects and lack enough willingness to conduct their duties, starting from the daily regime of the children, the establishment of friendly relations between them, the development of health habits and organization of extra-curricular activities. For the time being the teachers' attitude towards the children and the existing conditions have not yet become a center of attraction for the children and as a result there are some cases when children are unwilling to stay at the boarding house. For that purpose it would be necessary for the boarding house teachers to exchange experience with their colleagues from the village of Gradetz.*

*Regarding the children's admission. For the time being the admission requirements are observed. We recommend that after the relocation of the pharmacy room which is to be done in 4-5 days and after the new pupils are accommodated in the former pharmacy room the boarding school should cease to enroll new pupils. All efforts should be directed towards the establishment of such conditions that the boarding house becomes more than a second home for the children. If funds are allocated for the construction of additional premises similar to those which are under preparation the number of pupils can increase to 80 in the next year. This will also resolve the other two problems of the boarding house: the three shifts of study and the need for premises for two more kindergarten groups.*

*Head of Department:  
/G. Pavlov/*

On October 9<sup>th</sup> 1978 the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party passed Resolution No. 1360 for *For Further Improvement of the Activities among Bulgarian Gypsies for their Better Involvement in the Establishment of a Developed Socialist Society*. This Resolution was followed by a Decree No. 7 from January 26<sup>th</sup> 1979. The above two documents provided for measures directed towards “*active involvement of Gypsies in socially-useful activities, improvement of their education and of their living conditions, raising their communist and civic awareness as equal citizens of socialist Bulgaria, and encouragement of their active participation in the building of a developed socialist society*”. An emphasis was put on the necessity for “*gradual desegregation of the isolated districts and neighborhoods in the next 10-12 years*“, as well as for an improvement of Gypsies’ professional qualification, for an establishment of a wide network of nurseries and kindergartens in order to provide for the earlier study of the Bulgarian language, for desegregation of the minority schools and school boarding houses and for special measures for Gypsies’ involvement in amateur art activities. Most of those recommendations were not supported in terms of funding and organization and remained unfulfilled.

### **Interethnic relations. Social and cultural interaction.**

Unlike the case in Western Europe where Roma are traditionally considered nomads as a result of their mass migration from the newly liberated Wallachia and Moldova in 1865, in Bulgarian land the majority of them settled during the period of the Ottoman rule. The process of settlement of the various Roma sub-groups has different characteristics. It is long-term and steady for the *Yerlia* sub-group while some of the other sub-groups were partly settled for a long time - they had a permanent place of residence during the winter which they left in the summer in order to practice their traditional crafts /especially the sub-groups of *kalaidzhii* (tinsmiths), *rogozhari* (rush mat makers), *vretenari* (spindle-makers), *ursari* (bear-trainers), etc./. Other sub-groups remained nomadic or semi-nomadic up until 1958 when the last of the nomadic groups were forcibly settled.

The co-existence of Roma and Bulgarians in the course of centuries has led to a deep intercultural exchange between the two ethnic communities. For example, there is a hypothesis that the typical Balkan folk music has been strongly influenced by the traditional Gypsy music with odd-numbered time signatures. Many of the traditional beliefs and methods of dealing with various troubles, especially diseases, psychological problems, states of depression, etc. are probably also borrowed from the Gypsies.

The long-settled Roma on their part selectively included and transformed whole layers of the traditional culture of the surrounding population into their own cultural model. They adopted the religion, Christian or Muslim, of their neighbors, very often their language or languages, and to a great extent their labor discipline, rituals, rites and festivities. On the other hand those Roma lost some specific features of their group cultural model, for example their potestarian bodies and in some cases – their language and traditional crafts. The traditional Roma culture is preserved to a greatest degree in the semi-nomadic and nomadic sub-groups (which remained such up until the middle of the XX c.) and especially in the sub-groups of *kardarashi* and *lovvari* (which are still very mobile). Only those sub-groups have still preserved the special potestarian body *meshere* (the Gypsy court). 85% of the representatives of those sub-groups have preserved their language. Endogamy is

still strictly observed among them. In addition they have preserved their traditional crafts to the greatest extent compared to other Roma sub-groups.

The way of life of both the settled and the nomadic Roma sub-groups had a strong influence upon their folk tales, myths and legends (Tomova, 1999).

The settled Roma sub-groups adopted a significant part of the folklore of the ethnic communities they had lived in close contact with for a long time. They have created their own mythology including a series of legends and myths which “explain” why they differ from the other people: why they are poor, why they do not have their own state or alphabet, why their groups live scattered all over the world and even why they have darker complexion.... These legends provide a more acceptable explanation for Roma peculiarities or serve them to underestimate “the other peoples” values. The legends account for the lower social status of the Roma mainly by emphasizing the following “objective” reasons for this: God’s or some saints’ will (or arbitrariness); unjust rulers who punish not only the culprits of a particular misdeed but the whole group; unequal social start, etc., and not by the characteristics “the others” ascribe to them: laziness, irresponsibility, low intelligence, incompetence, etc.

The main characters - Roma - are often represented by victims of somebody else’s injustice, envy, ill will, etc. The folk tales are full of forlorn and self-pity. However, they also contain some negative opinions of Roma about themselves: that Roma had suffered because they could not join together; because they had become too proud of being God-chosen and stopped paying the due honor to God; because they had relied too much on good luck and happiness without making efforts to keep them; because Roma had infuriated God with their refusal to choose their own fate or with the refusal to accept God’s will for their destiny, craft, land, etc. - something which the folk tales of the “nomad” groups usually lack.

In their folklore, the nomads, who had less contacts with the “others”, were much more “self-sufficient” and isolated within their own group, are less interested in other peoples’ values, and they neither excuse for nor suffer from missing those values.

The folk tale tradition of the settled Roma lacks heroic characters - the main character almost never confronts the enemy openly. In difficult situations this character usually uses his psychological competence, intelligence, wit, or bargains or refuses to face the problem by transferring his aggression upon his folks (for example, he beats his wife, abandons his family, etc.) The nomads have folk tales in which the character bravely faces his enemy (a beast, a gadzho /non Roma/, a policeman, etc./ and wins the battle.

In their folk tales the settled Roma often represent their characters as skillful craftsmen and hard working people. The range of their skills and crafts is very wide. Many of the Roma folk tales about dexterous craftsmen have their analogues in the folk narrative tradition of the other ethnic groups on the Balkans. Nomads on their part exclude the concepts of “hard working” and “lazy” from their folk tales.

The settled Roma often characterize wealthy people by negative moral characteristics. In their tales those characters always go to hell after their death. This is yet another similarity between the Roma tales and those of the Balkan countries. The nomads never consider wealth as something evil or

wealthy people - as immoral or sinful. They totally neglect the issue of money-making and never view it from a moral perspective.

Myths and legends describing theft in a positive way are very rare among the settled Roma sub-groups. In some isolated cases they explain the reason why a Roma has stolen something or underestimate the misdeed but they never represent theft as a craft or as a positive quality.

Nomads, on the contrary, have various versions of the legend explaining that God gave them theft, deceit and lie as crafts which they can practice at the expense of *gadzho*. The skillful theft, the daring robbery especially, is highly appreciated and contributes to the prestige of the main character. In addition, theft, deceit and lie are represented as universal laws of mankind, hypocritically denied by *gadzho*.

Common for the folk tales of both groups is their firm belief that no one; not even God has the right to decide their fate. They reject even God's gifts as land, respected crafts, alphabet, etc. in the name of their freedom to choose for themselves or to refuse any of those gifts. Both groups often represent their main Roma characters as God-chosen. They have special abilities to communicate with the "other" world. They are very closely related to Nature and they even understand the languages of the various animals and plants. Both groups typically handle a difficult situation with the help of luck and they usually have it. Women are often represented as carriers of ill powers which justifies the violence against them (Tomova, 1999).

Bulgarians on their part also included Gypsies in their folklore. Some diseases are personified as "black shabby Gypsy women". The Gypsy couple, the Gypsy woman with a child and the Gypsy sorcerer are stock characters in Bulgarian carnival games. The puppet theater and the circus art in Bulgaria have long been associated with the Gypsy traditions. We have already discussed the role of Roma in the country's economic life and system of rituals.

In contrast with the situation in the Central and West European countries Roma in Bulgaria have never lived in compact masses outside the boundaries of settlements, although they continued to live isolated in separate neighborhoods even after the National Liberation and nowadays many of the big urban Roma neighborhoods have the typical ghetto look. However, the above needs some further clarification. Roma were forced to leave their homes and neighborhoods more often than the rest of the Bulgarian citizens for various reasons - most frequently urban planning or mere discrimination.

Both in the past and in more recent times travelers' and semi-nomadic groups have often had difficulties in their attempts to settle in a town or a village for a certain period of time. Crowe describes such a case from the time of the Ottoman rule. The research team found other documents related to similar problems in the Regional Historical Archives in Sliven.

File-card No.46 ê, list 1, archive unit 391 from 1893, page 89

*Resolution III  
of the Sliven Municipal Council,  
passed at its session held on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1893  
Minutes № 26*

*The Council has considered Letter of Recommendation No. 2817 of the Sliven Regional Governor as from May 21<sup>st</sup> which recommends the implementation of the resolution of the Sliven Regional Sanitary Council as from March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1892, minutes No. 1, regarding the relocation of the Gypsy shacks, located in the southern parts of Sliven, because the whole town is polluted by their dirt.*

*Having given the matter due consideration and in view of the fact that the above resolution of the Sanitary Council has already been approved by the Civic Sanitary Directorate and that the relocation of the Gypsy shacks is really necessary for the safety of public health, in mind of the great significance of this issue and of the fact that the new location of the shacks needs to be determined in advance, the Council took the following resolution by unanimous consent:*

*The Council hereby appoints a commission composed of the Mayor, the Councilors D. Yordanov and G. Mouhtarov, the citizen A. Saraivanov, the Regional Doctor Rabinovich and the Municipal Engineer G. Spirov. This commission should study the matter in details and should determine an appropriate location for building new shacks for the Gypsies.*

*File-card 46K, list 1, archive unit 39, page 14-15*

**24. Consideration of Report incoming No. 12840 from August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1937**

*The Head of the Technical Service reported to the Council that the small camps of Gypsies-koritari (tub-makers) scattered along the left bank of the Korucha river near the Dame Gruev district do not meet the urban planning requirements and can become sources of infection which would easily spread in the nearby districts and all over the town.*

*Having in mind that those Gypsies live in hovels which can easily be removed for urban planning purposes and as a preventive health measure the Head of the Technical Service suggests that these Gypsies be relocated to one of the south-eastern parts of the Dame Gruev district.*

*Considering the fact that the suggestion of the Head of the Technical Service is of a great importance to the town's planning and health conditions the Council  
Decided as follows:*

*The Gypsies-koritari should be moved from the left bank of the Korucha river to that part of the Dame Gruev district, which is under construction. The standing committee and the Head of the Technical Service should determine when and how this relocation is to be done.*

*File-card 46 k., list 1, archive unit 440, page 177 from 1934*

*M.N.S./No.12867 from August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1934*

*From   Department of Agriculture  
          Veterinary Section*

*To       The Head of Regional Veterinary Service*

*The wandering travelers, Gypsies and others similar to them are the main carriers of all possible contagious diseases among cattle and people, although subject to the Rural Municipalities Act vagrancy is forbidden.*

*In order to prevent the spreading of epizootics, rabies, foot-and-mouth disease, scab and other diseases among domestic animals due to the vagrant way of life of Gypsies, all animals those vagrants own should be examined and their veterinary cards should be checked by the sanitary control authorities. Gypsies should not be allowed to take with them dogs, swine and birds because in such way they can easily spread infectious diseases among those species.*

*I hereby instruct you to order your the doctors and doctor's assistants under your authority to strictly apply all regulations regarding the vagrants.*

*Head of the Department: Dr. Gudzhev*

After the Bulgarian National Liberation the long-term settled Roma living dispersed among the rest of the population sent their children to study together in mixed classes with the children of their non-Roma neighbors; the adult Roma worked on equal terms with the representatives of the other ethnic communities in the country and they maintained good neighborly relations of mutual help in their everyday life. Therefore the present concentration of Roma in the big urban and village ghettos found the representatives of both ethnic groups unprepared to cope with the processes of degradation taking place in the ghettos as result of the segregation, of the mass exclusion of Roma from the labor market and of the increasing impoverishment of their community. A significant part of our Roma respondents - 41% - declared that they considered themselves victims of discrimination because of the neighborhood they live in. According to them the single mentioning of the name of their district is enough for employers to refuse them jobs. Our respondents consider that they have a limited access to health services also due to their isolation in a compact Roma neighborhood. According to our interviews Roma are most frequently refused medical aid - an ambulance or a home visit of a doctor or a nurse in emergency cases - because of the remoteness of the Roma ghetto. The processes of segregation become more and more visible in the system of education - Bulgarian children gradually leave district schools and the percentage of Roma pupils in there sharply increases. This usually leads to a general deterioration of the educational process in those schools.

In the communist period a lot of measures were taken for settling the social, educational and cultural differences between the Roma and the rest of the Bulgarian population. This had a negative impact upon the attitude of *gadzho* (non-Roma) towards Roma. Roma got closer to the "average Bulgarian" from the point of view of their social and economic status, which contributed to their better acceptance from "the others". However, the attempts of the communist party and government to enhance the processes of "unification" of Roma with the rest of the Bulgarian citizens found expression in a very active policy of "social engineering", which led to the loss of the traditional skills of many Roma families to find their own solutions of the problems and made them develop new life strategies, which practically increased their cultural alienation from the rest of the population. For example, the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party for "birth encouragement" did not change the reproductive behavior of the ethnic Bulgarians, who preserved the tendency towards decrease in the number of children per family. This policy, however, was very well accepted by the Roma community. A significant part of the Roma women used the privileges provided by this social policy, namely: the right of young mothers to a paid leave for taking care of their babies for a

period of 3 years after birth, which was also considered length of labor; the right to earlier pension for mothers of many children; the right to social insurance for birth and taking care of children and of free of charge nursery and kindergarten services for families with many children; the right for families with many children to use transport services and social holiday houses at a very reduced price, etc. Many Roma women completely conformed their life with this policy provisions. It has become an established practice among them to give birth to many children within short intervals and then in about 15 years to be granted social pension as mothers of many children. Thus Roma women were relieved from the necessity to work and the state took the all the responsibilities for children's education and health care. Thus the number of Roma in the country sharply increased, which made them "more visible", and respectively, more strongly subjected to various expressions of a negative attitude. The rest of the ethnic groups continued to consider Roma parasites, totally dependent on social assistance. From the moment when this social policy was canceled Roma families were found to be extremely vulnerable and affected by the unfavorable social changes. The sharp impoverishment of the group made it even more visible; it joined together various negative factors - ethnic and cultural differences and poverty - and increased the tendencies towards isolation of Roma from all social spheres.

Up till 1946, 81% of Roma in Bulgaria were illiterate. In the 1950s and 1960s the slogans were the elimination of illiteracy and the improvement of the education of the whole population.

The educational program came across the most difficulties among the Roma. Many of the efforts and initiatives of "people's power" came to grief because of the passive resistance of the Roma community, which saw schools as alien and hostile institutions aiming to destroy their traditions, to assimilate ethnic minorities and to unify society. On the other hand, the low level of industrialization of Bulgarian economy gave them the opportunity to work even when illiterate.

Various measures were undertaken to settle the nomadic and semi-nomadic groups during the communist period. After 1958 the nomadic way of life practically came to an end even for the last groups. In this way, it was also possible for their children to fall within the scope of the schools. Compulsory education was introduced first up to the 8<sup>th</sup> class, and later up to 11<sup>th</sup> class. Administrative punishments of varying severity were inflicted on the parents of truant children. Schoolteachers' and head teachers' references depended on "the full range of the contingent subject to education" as an indicator. A practice was established the teachers to visit the Roma districts every morning and gather the children from their homes.

A diversity of initiatives were undertaken to stimulate Roma families to assist in the State's efforts to educate children and youngsters. Local cooperatives and town halls paid for food in school canteens in most villages and small town schools, as well as in newly -built schools in Gypsy neighborhoods. Up until 1992 most textbooks were paid for by the State. Around one tenth of Roma children were educated in boarding houses. In these schools, the State paid for all the food, clothing, heating, sport, daytime lessons and upbringing. The State also paid a high proportion of the food, heating and educational expenses for the youngest children in nursery schools and all the expenses for families with more than two children.

The Roma reacted in a specific way to this massive new social pressure to be educated. They were compelled to submit to the obligation to send their children to school at least for a while and readily used the social benefits allocated for this, but in a mass scale they did not include education in their

scale of values. Many children attended school irregularly, or left prematurely. This could be illustrated also with data from the present survey.

As from 1989, most of the social benefits which pupils availed themselves of, such as free or almost free food, clothes, textbooks, etc., were abolished. Representatives of the Roma community very often interpreted this as a discriminatory measure intended mainly against them, as they have more children and are in more difficult social position. They often see the shrinking of social benefits for education as a breach on the part of the state of a tacit agreement, in accordance with which they would lead their children go to Bulgarian schools if the State takes on all or most of the expenses for their maintenance while they are at school. In almost all of their spontaneous or organized protests against government social policy in recent years, the main slogan “We won’t let our children go to school if the State won’t do anything for us” has been raised as a threat.

At the moment, the mass impoverishment in the Roma community, the reduction in social benefits for pupils and students and the lack of administrative compulsion for parents to send their children to school lead to a mass dropout of school every year.

There is an alarming tendency among Roma for lower education of the children compared to this of their parents. Only the children of half of the interviewed families go to school regularly. 43% of the families declared that they did not have children at school age, although this assertion turned out to be untrue for more than half of the cases. There are families with children at the age of 7 – 10 years that didn’t start going to school yet, or 14 – 16 years old who have already stopped going to school. According to head teachers and local authority bodies, the proportion of truant children varies considerably from one neighborhood or village to another. The highest attendance is observed in Nikola Kochev quarter in Sliven, and in village of Gorno Alexandrovo. In the villages of Sotirya and Topolchane, as well as in Nadezhda ghetto in Sliven, where Naked Gypsies prevail, around 70% of the children are truants.

Interethnic relations between Bulgarians and Roma as well as intragroup connections between different Roma sub-groups went through various transformations during the different historic periods. The attitude of Bulgarians in Sliven to the different Roma sub-groups varies from totally negative towards the semi-nomadic groups of the Naked Roma (rejection, refusal to accept the other) to positive (integrative) towards the rest of the Roma.

Due to their lack of permanent dwelling the semi-nomadic Roma groups could not establish stable economic and cultural contacts with the majority. During the Ottoman rule they made their living mainly by wooden bowl-making, basket-making, fortune telling, begging, tinkering and stealing. This determined the negative attitude of the urban and rural communities towards them.

The settling of a part of the Roma in Sliven, which, according to Dr. Tabakov, dates back to the XV c., led to their inclusion in the town economy and consequently to serious changes in their everyday life and culture. This created opportunities for them to start permanent jobs. They established permanent contacts with the local population. Representatives of both communities were interested in keeping good relations and using the services offered by the “other”.

Roma who settled in Sliven before the Liberation were craftsmen - mostly ironmongers and merchants. Up until September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944 there were 20 families of blacksmiths in Kutzlohor



neighborhood After that Roma blacksmiths established the labor cooperative “Zheljazna reka”, which included mainly Roma craftsmen and existed up until 1989. The rest of the poorer Roma who settled in Sliven were woodcutters, harvesters, quarrymen and common laborers in the vineyards and cornfields of the Bulgarians. Those Roma were Christians and they started naming themselves “Bulgarian Roma”. Most of the blacksmiths and the musicians are from the group of the “Turkish Roma”. They are strictly monogamous and have lived separately in Nadezhda neighborhood (Dame Gruev neighborhood) since the beginning of the century.

The process of industrialization of the region and integration of Bulgarian Roma in the town economy led to their quicker isolation from the traditional way of life which brought them closer to the every day life of Bulgarian workers. According to data from reports of a cooperative in Sliven we understand that at certain periods Bulgarian Roma were up to 60% of the textile workers in the town. So for almost a century and a half a core of permanent workers was formed among the Christian Roma community who seriously differed from the other Roma sub-groups. They had comparatively high level of education and qualification, very close to those of Bulgarians. There have been no problems with their labor discipline for a long time. They had the same family model as Bulgarians.

According to Dr. Tabakov, the village of Topolchane is relatively new – it was founded as early as in the XVIII c. According to data from the 1885 census the village population included 90 Roma – about 1/10 of its total number, or 864 individuals. According to the village civic registers most of the local Roma have Turkish names and are registered as “Turkish Gypsies” and “Muslims”. There are only a few “Bulgarian Gypsies”. In 1920 the population in Topolchane was already 1275 people. 202 of them were Roma. 110 of them spoke Bulgarian as a mother tongue. There were no more Turks in the village, consequently all the 69 individuals who identified themselves, as Muslims were Roma.

During the collectivization period (first half of the 50’s) the Roma have joined the local agricultural cooperatives. By the end of the 80’s about 300-400 Roma worked in as vine-growers, crop-raisers, stock-breeders and water-cart men. It means that practically all workers in the village agricultural cooperative were Roma. There were also 50 Bulgarians in the cooperative but they had mainly administrative jobs.

In the late 60’s Bulgarians from the village started to look for jobs in the near town. More than 800 Bulgarians from Topolchane have worked in various industrial enterprises and administrative offices in Sliven. Part of the Roma followed this tendency and also moved to work in the town.

In the communist period all Roma children went to school. A large number of them have elementary education and several Roma children - mainly from families of Bulgarian Roma - graduated from secondary schools in Sliven. In order to provide qualified workers for the local agricultural cooperative the village mayor signed a contract with the School of Agriculture in the town of Stara Zagora, which started to hold vocational training courses in Topolchane. Many Roma graduated from this school. 20 of them became tractor-drivers and another got professional driving license and worked as drivers in Sliven.

In the mid-60’s, after a decision of the Municipal Council in Sliven some Roma families the town, whose members had committed crimes, were forcefully moved to the villages of Topolchane and Sotirya, as well as in other villages in the region. This practice was largely spread throughout the country and lasted nearly for 30 years. The mayor of Topolchane asserted that in spite of this

decision of the Council there was no mass and continual migration of Roma from Nadezhda to the village. However, the number of marriages between Roma from Topolchane and those from the town ghetto has increased. The mayor also mentioned several cases when “suspicious” families settled in the outskirts of the Roma neighborhood in the village, but the local authorities took the necessary measures to chase them away.

In the 70s and the 80s a significant number of men from Topolchane (both Roma and Bulgarian) worked in the local agricultural cooperative and in the industrial enterprises in Sliven. In the 90s a large part of them gradually became unemployed. According to the village mayor after the close down of the agricultural cooperative the rate of unemployment among local Roma has reached 98%. This led to a sharp impoverishment of the local Roma, to an increase in the number of Roma children dropping out from school and to a deterioration of Roma health status. In order to provide for their families’ basic need many Roma men got involved in criminal activities. The village mayor, the policemen and many of the local people keep pointing out the fact that in the last few years Roma have plundered and devastated all villas in the region and that they systematically steal the agricultural produce of the local farmers. As a result of this the relations between Bulgarians and “naked” Roma have grown extremely tense.

Although, already since 16<sup>th</sup> c. the village has been famous with its Roma craftsmen, Roma were just a small part of its population. According to the data from the census in 1885, the population of Gorno Alexandrovo consisted of 543 individuals. Only 35 of them were Roma, the rest were Bulgarians. The Muslims in the village were 23 persons. We suppose these were a part of the Roma in the village.

The Roma were well accepted by the local population. In the past they were mainly involved in seasonal agricultural work. Most of the local Bulgarian families kept big herds of sheep and men were mostly engaged in stock-breeding. So Bulgarians used to hire Roma as cheap labor - for ploughing, sowing and gathering crops and fruit. Old local registers show that only two Roma families from the village had practiced their old craft as blacksmiths.

During the communist regime Roma worked in the local cooperative farm and their children studied in the village school together with Bulgarian children. The only difference between the way of life of Roma and Bulgarians in the village was the higher birth rate of the Roma families, but even this difference grew smaller in 70s. By the end of the 70s all young Bulgarians have already left the village. Thus there remained only Roma pupils in the local elementary school. Up until recently their parents worked in the village cooperative farms. In 2000 the last parcels of arable land planted with vine and orchards were returned to their ex-proprietors - Bulgarians. The cooperative farms were closed down and the local Roma lost their jobs. In the spring most of our adult Roma respondents were seized with despair due to their situation of sharp impoverishment, although they still managed to provide for the basic needs of their families though small private farming. In the village of Gorno Alexandrovo we observed the best neighbor relations between Roma and Bulgarians compared to the rest of the sites included in our study. However, local Roma expressed their stronger feeling of the growing economic differences and the estrangement between the two ethnic groups.

## **6. Possibilities for Comparative Analysis**

Bulgaria/Poland: Comparability of the studies in Sotirya/Sliven and Miscolec/ Krasznokvajda. We could study the influence of the different cultures on the various ways of coping with poverty; we could search for evidences if there are particular specificities, which make certain cultural models more vulnerable to poverty and marginalization. Is there a culture of poverty?

Bulgaria/Slovakia: Comparability of the studies in Sotirya/Sliven and Kosice/Zavadka. Probably there are grounds for comparative analysis of the situation in the village of Sotirya with this in the village of Rimavska Sobota (Livia's case) or with Salov's Roma community. The level of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization of the above communities seem similar.

Bulgaria/Romania: Comparability of the situation in Sotirya/Sliven with that in Cluj/Floresti (Gabriel's case.) and Balan. The level of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization of the Roma in the above mentioned communities seem quite similar. We use similar research methods and techniques, similar theoretical perspectives and this will help us to perform a good comparative survey.

Bulgaria/Hungary: Comparability of the situation in Sotirya, Topolchane and Sliven with that in Tornanadaska. In all these communities we could observe the formation of underclass among the Roma. These are segregated communities. The level of unemployment among them was higher than 90% in last few years. More and more children drop out of the school and they will have no chances to find work. The families are extremely poor. The dependence on social assistance becomes stronger. The strategies for survival seem to be similar. It will be interesting to see how old are the processes of underclass formation in the studied communities. Judit is also interested in the impact of the interethnic relations, and separation or dispersion of the Roma among the main population on the processes of underclass formation.

Bulgaria/Russia: Comparative study of the impact that the distance between the village and town center has upon the processes of impoverishment of the rural (Roma) communities. The Russian hypothesis that during the crisis the villages, situated closer to the town and those, which become part of its network are badly affected by the crash in the local networks could be supported by similar observations in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria/Giorgia: It would be quite interesting to compare the situation in Sliven's Roma quarters and those of the Kurds in Telavi. We could observe the similarities in the processes of impoverishment, strategies for survival and migration in Roma settlements in Sliven and in Osetian community in Georgia.

## Conclusions

The results from our study show deepening negative processes taking place in the Roma community in Bulgaria which might become irreversible if no measures are promptly taken to stop them. There is no sufficient data showing that decentralization of social services has proved successful in slowing down those processes. In many cases local authorities seem to feel insecure in their power to take initiatives and responsibilities. Local officials usually explain that with the limited which prevents them from conducting their own social policy and forces them to comply with the central authorities decisions, which do not always conform to the specific local needs. On the other hand, when they are representatives of opposition political parties local officials are reluctant to take initiatives for fear of being “*punished by the authoritarian rule of the Prime Minister*”, which might have a negative impact on the state subsidy for their municipality.

The deep crisis applies to all the parameters of the individual and group existence of the Gypsies. Its end result is a tendency towards the increasing disintegration and marginalization of this ethnic group. We are witnessing the processes of rapid underclass formation in the big Roma neighborhoods

The group of extremely poor and marginalized. Roma is growing fast. The adults in this group stopped working since a long period of time or have never worked. The parents often cease to care for their children, or force them to beg, steal or sell their bodies in order to get money for alcohol and to feed the family. The number of families abandoned by the father is increasing. There is a growing tendency for the birth rate to increase, the aim being to get hold of state benefits paid for the bringing up of a small child. The number of seriously damaged and chronically sick children is increasing dramatically. This fact, together with the sharp decline in school attendance by Roma children in recent years will have lasting negative consequences. Lowering of the already poor standard of education and qualification in the Roma community will lead it into a vicious circle of unemployment, misery, marginalization and crime.

The Bulgarian social service system is not yet fully prepared to deal effectively with the deepening of those processes. In none of the municipalities included in the survey or in any of the sites with numerous Roma population there is a local strategy for opening of extra job positions for unskilled workers. The municipal authorities have been passively following the programs developed by the Council of Ministers – the Winter Program and the Temporary Employment Program. The poor condition of the local economies does not encourage them to search for additional means for improvement of the services delivered to the population or for the re-integration of the Roma into the life of the community. Only in Sliven, under strong pressure by several NGOs, the municipality authorities allocated funds from the budget to employ two assistant teachers, who are Roma, in the two big Roma schools. The term of the employment contract of one of the assistant teachers is from September 1999 till January 2000.

None of the municipalities has been accumulating its own funds for social assistance. The officials from the regional labor offices have been implementing the Decree on Birth Encouragement and the Social Assistance Act. The only modifications in the implementation referred to restriction of the range of people who are eligible for social aid. Thus the Sliven local authorities do not grant monthly social aid to the people in the villages, mostly poor Roma.

The Decree on Birth Encouragement needs a serious review. The provision of mother and children's allowances should be accompanied by reliable mechanisms for fund spending control, so that Roma can be guaranteed enough money for food for the family, the necessary quantity of warm clothes and shoes, and textbooks and school appliances for the children. The aid for teaching materials can be linked with the regular school attendance of the children – the aid can be distributed at school against a proof of regular attendance.

The share of Roma children in nursery schools has been steadily decreasing. The municipalities try to make economies in the sphere of education by not offering preparatory classes for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, despite the legal regulations, and by reducing the numbers of the semi-boarding school groups. This is a policy, which dooms Roma children to dropping out of school early and against, which there should be taken counter-measures.

The Ministry of Education, despite its declarations, did not do the necessary to promote the employment of Roma teachers at the schools in which Roma students predominate. The work on the introduction of new intercultural programs and teaching methods, aiming to overcome the Bulgarian ethnocentrism in the education curricula, and to form a tolerant and humane attitude in children towards inter-ethnic relations since a very early age, proceeds at a very slow pace. Despite the proven advantages of the intensive study of the fine arts and music by the children as a means promoting their motivation to study, the Ministry of Education did not provide assistance with respect to the expansion of the pilot project to more schools. The policy of the Ministry of Education with regard to the desegregation of the Roma schools is not well established; nor have the officials from the Ministry of Education asked the local school institutions or the local Roma communities about opinions and recommendations in this respect.

The school head masters have been encountering many difficulties in their attempts to introduce in the schools new vocational classes, which are more attractive to the students and which would provide them with better employment opportunities after graduation. Even when the local government authorities are convinced that such changes in the curricula of the schools in the territory of the municipality are necessary, they do not take the responsibility to make those changes since this is the prerogative of the Ministry of Education.

The school management bodies do not take enough initiative to search funds by which to organize additional extracurricular (or social) activities for their students because all funds they manage to accumulate should be given to the local government authorities and the school is not guaranteed that it will get those funds back. The head masters do not even have the right to conclude contracts for lease of property owned by the school without authorization by the Ministry of Education. Sometimes, when the school's board of trustees manage to gather funds to finance some extracurricular activities, the municipality takes away those funds or demands from the principals to spend them on heating in the winter months (such was the case in Sliven.)

The mass of the Roma community does not have any information about the forthcoming reforms in the health care system. If the local government authorities do not take the necessary action to fill in the information gap in the territory of their municipalities, they risk the conflicts in health care, which have become more frequent, growing into mass protests against the overall social policy.

There are serious fears, however, that the health reform will lead to further exclusion of the poorest and the persons with the most serious health problems from the health care system. This will affect Roma to the greatest extent. Taking into consideration that about 2/3 of the Roma families have chronically sick members, that a significant part of the babies are prematurely born and tend to be in unstable health, that the share of the handicapped among Roma is six times the average for the country, it is obvious that the two or three free medical check-ups per person per year the health reform provides for could not be enough to satisfy even the most urgent needs of the majority of the Roma community.

Many of them will be deprived even of this opportunity due to the fact that they are not registered as unemployed on the one hand, and are not able to pay the health insurance contributions, on the other hand. The present survey found that 1/4 of unemployed Roma are not registered in the labor offices as unemployed and nobody pays health insurance contributions for them. In most cases those people are heads of families with many children. More often than not their children are not vaccinated. Being left outside the health insurance network, those children will not be vaccinated in the future either, which carries risks not only for them but also for the whole society, and will be deprived of medical care. In most of the cases the interviewed doctors state their determination to provide services to all sick children regardless of whether they have health insurance or not but this readiness will be limited by financial problems and a shortage of time.

The reform in the social service sphere is characterized at present by its incompleteness and inefficiency. The government should overcome the temptation to solely take decisions about everything and everybody and should delegate more rights to the local government authorities. Firstly, the rights to collect municipal taxes and fees should be extended. Secondly, the municipalities have to become more independent in deciding which social service establishments to preserve and which to close. Thirdly, they should have more freedom in taking decisions on specific problems, related to social service delivery, education and health care in the individual municipalities.